THE ® saint MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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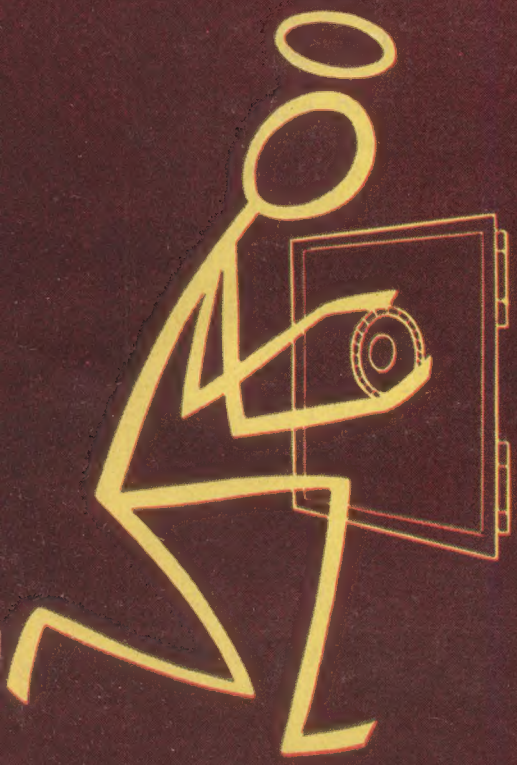
Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS



The Lost Special
by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Error at Daybreak
by Carter Dickson

Death in the King's Room
by Sax Rohmer

The Reluctant Victim
by Lawrence Treat

The Brain Workers
by Leslie Charteris

THE VERY GROOVY CORPSE
A NEW STORY by CRAIG RICE

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING SIZE PUBLICATION

THOSE OF YOU who have not had occasion to cross the Atlantic recently, or who are not in the fuel business, may not yet know that the venerable adage about "taking coals to Newcastle," as a synonym for something as superfluous as shipping beer to Milwaukee, is now as outdated as jokes about the late Queen Mary's hats. In fact, they have been importing coal into Newcastle for so long now that it isn't even amusing any more to recall the death of the ancient simile.

In England, on the other hand, where I was recently visiting, I found that they would still consider such a comparison as "sending gangsters to Chicago" a fair substitute. And such has been the legacy of legend left by Al Capone, augmented by an astronomical footage of movie film and mountains of popular fiction, that probably even in America you would find few people outside Cook County, Illinois, who would call the implication unjust.

So in case you missed the latest FBI list of felony rates, and because we want to be able to go on claiming that our readers are the best-informed in the world, we must tell you that in percentage of murder, mayhem, and major larceny measured against population, Chicago today does not even make the first 20. (New York, which might be anybody's second guess at a crime capital, has less than half as much as Dallas—and Dallas places no better than 8th.) At the top of the list, with an awe-inspiring lead, stands Los Angeles, with almost four times the percentage of staid and virtuous Chicago.

We are glad to be able to set the record straight in this preface so that nobody will think that in giving the Royal Box to THE VERY GROOVY CORPSE (perhaps the late Craig Rice's last unpublished story of the wonderful John J. Malone) we intended to help perpetuate an outworn libel. And while we are at it, we have the pleasure in this same issue of exploding, with THE LOST SPECIAL, an almost universal belief that the only detective stories Conan Doyle ever wrote were about Sherlock Holmes, and pinking (with DEATH IN THE KING'S ROOM) the rather widespread idea that Sax Rohmer's only superman was called Fu Manchu.

It is also true that I once wrote some short stories which were not, like THE BRAIN WORKERS, about the Saint. But they will never be reprinted here while I am Supervising Editor.

Leslie Charteris

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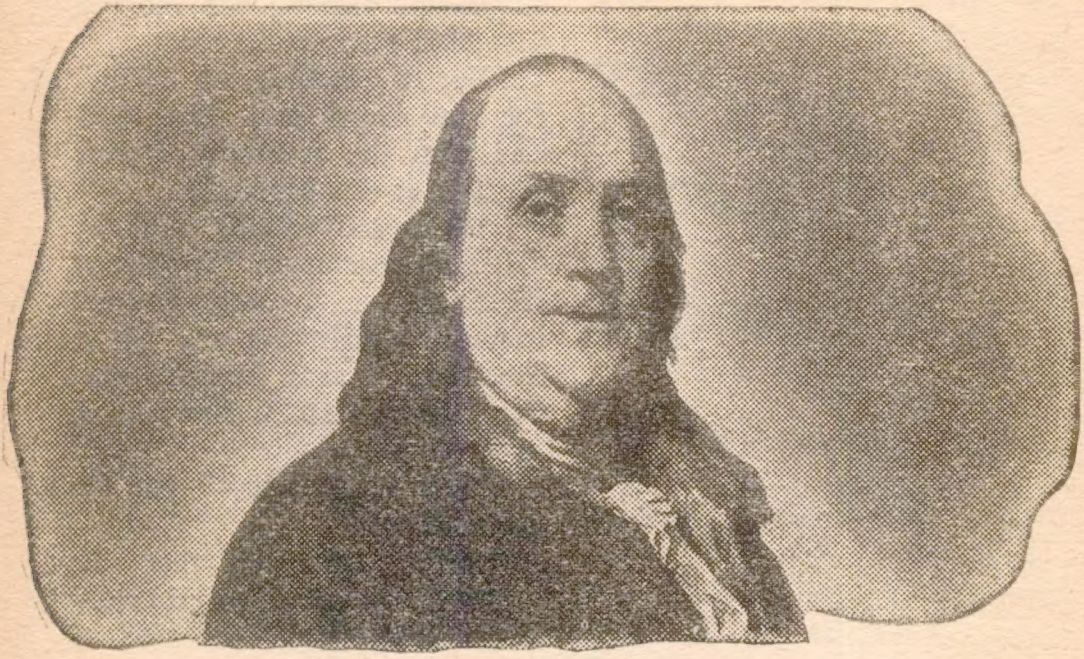
WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



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the very groovy corpse

by . . . Craig Rice

The note on the dead girl's sweater had said she'd had to be gotten out of the way. Why? Why kill Anne-Maria?

JOHN J. MALONE finished his glass of beer sadly, put the tumbler down and looked anxiously down the bar to where Joe the Angel was arguing with an old City Hall watchman.

"You're thinking of 1923," Joe the Angel said. "In 1923 Zev won the Kentucky Derby. In 1922 it was Morvich."

"You're telling me?" said the City Hall watchman. "You're trying to tell me, I mean. You got everything right but you got it exactly backwards. Morvich won the Derby in 1923. Zev won it in 1922."

"Now I ask you—" Joe the Angel began.

Malone thought that he couldn't have cared less. He wondered briefly about the kind of man who would name a horse Morvich (or Zev) even in the 1920's, instead of a good solid name like Flicka (or, possibly, O'Hanlon, or even Malone). But that wasn't very interesting, either.

Just as he had reluctantly decided that the mail might have something in it besides bills, and

---

The passing of Craig Rice was a loss to all of us who enjoyed her quietly zany pastels of a side of life in Chicago not known to many. A remarkable woman in many ways, blunt and outspoken, and a careful researcher, Craig Rice was a unique person in this field. We are happy to bring you one of the last stories she wrote about this remarkable lawyer—John J. Malone.

---

that it might even pay him to go up to his office and find out, Joe the Angel happened to glance down the bar.

"Another beer, Malone?" he called.

Malone hesitated.

"I'll put it on your tab," Joe the Angel said. "And while you drink it I want to talk to you."

"Giving up, eh?" said the City Hall watchman. "Admitting defeat?"

"I have important matters to discuss," said Joe the Angel. He drew the beer and put it in front of Malone.

The little lawyer lifted the glass gratefully and drank. Some seconds later he said: "Now. There was something you wanted to talk to me about. But I warn you—I don't know a single thing about horses. Except that you shouldn't put carts in front of them, and I don't know why not. Unless the horse is fond of kicking carts over."

"You make my head spin," Joe the Angel said. "Forget horses. This has nothing to do with horses."

Malone said: "Good," and applied himself to the beer again.

"You know my cousin Alphonsus?" Joe the Angel said suddenly.

Malone shook his head.

"Alphonsus is a good boy," Joe the Angel said, "in spite of living alone with a roommate and not with his family like a decent son. But the youngsters all do these things—perhaps it is even better that way."

Malone shrugged.

"Ah," said Joe the Angel. "But my cousin is young—just nineteen—and he worries. There is a girl—"

"There is always a girl," Malone said. "He wants to marry her."

"You do not understand," Joe the Angel said. "Wait. I will explain it to you. He goes to college, my cousin, to become a chemist. And he cannot marry any girl without leaving his school and taking a job. I tell him that he is only nineteen and there is no need for hurry. The world will still be here when he completes his school. But he says that love is more important. Love is greater than chemistry. Malone, what should I do?"

"How long has he known the girl?" Malone said.

"A week, maybe ten days," Joe the Angel said.

Malone nodded. "Tell him to give it another week." He finished the beer and stood up. "If any calls come for me I'm at my office," he said.

"Sure thing, Malone," Joe the Angel said.

Malone started for the door. Halfway there he bumped into something. He looked up.

The man wore a blue uniform and a worried expression. He was staring down at Malone with the

attitude of a farmer toward an egg that has just hatched into a small brown dog.

Malone spoke first. "Why, von Flanagan," he said with an air of pleased surprise. "What are you doing here?"

The police captain backed off a step. "I should be asking you the same question," he muttered. "Malone, did you hear about this before I did? Are you going to make trouble for me?"

"Hear about what?" Malone said.

"You know perfectly well what," von Flanagan said, unhelpfully. "But you're not interfering with an officer in the performance of his duty." He stepped past Malone and leaned across the bar. "Joe, have you got a cousin—a young kid—named Al or Alphonsus?"

Joe the Angel nodded. "I was just talking about him to Malone," he said. "What—"

"I came down to tell you myself," von Flanagan said. His composure seemed to leave him. "Was this Alphonsus going out with a girl named Anne-Maria Strella?"

"I was telling Malone about her," Joe the Angel said. "Tell me: something has happened to Alphonsus?"

Von Flanagan shook his head. "Alphonsus is okay, so far anyhow," he said. "But this Anne-Maria Strella—she's dead. And it looks like Alphonsus is the boy who killed her."

Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar had been very quiet, Malone remembered later. After a long time Joe himself said that his cousin Alphonsus was a good boy, a very fine specimen of a boy, and would not have hurt a fly even if he did live alone with a roommate. He had said that he understood von Flanagan had to follow the rules of the police department, and it was nothing personal, but he, without reservations, could vouch for his cousin. He was sure some simple mistake had been made, and he'd asked Malone to help him.

Surprisingly, von Flanagan hadn't offered many objections. "If Alphonsus didn't do the job," he said, "nobody's going to be much happier than I am. If you think you can dig up anything at all, Malone, you go right ahead."

"Sure," Malone said. "We'll have Alphonsus out of jail in jig time."

Now, back in his office, he wondered what he'd been so confident about.

The facts von Flanagan had given him seemed to point in only one direction. Anne-Maria also lived with a roommate, another girl named Betty Ponson, who'd seen Anne-Maria leave the apartment they shared at ten the previous evening. She'd said she was going to meet her boy friend.

She'd never returned. A man named Stephen Hissom had found her body, instead, at one-thirty in the morning. Hissom had been returning from a late party, and had found the girl crumpled in an alley with a note pinned to her sweater:

This chick was pretty groovy but I had to get her out of the way.

Naturally, there was no signature to the note, and it had been done in block printing.

Anne-Maria's head had been bashed in with a blunt instrument.

When the coroner discovered that the girl had been pregnant, von Flanagan had gone back to talk to Betty Ponson, Anne-Maria's roommate. But Betty had said she knew nothing about any of Anne-Maria's boy friends. She insisted she didn't even know their names.

And then, at seven in the morning, there'd been a phone call in Anne-Maria's apartment. Von Flanagan had picked up the receiver and talked to Joe the Angel's young cousin Alphonsus. He'd been calling his girl, Anne-Maria Strella.

The police had picked him up less than an hour later.

"It looks bad," Malone muttered.

From the outer office Maggie called: "What's that, Malone?"

"Nothing," Malone said. "I'm just mulling."

"You're what?"

"Mulling," Malone said. "Forget it."

Obviously, the first thing to do was to talk to Betty Ponson. Maybe he could find something the police had overlooked.

But it didn't sound very likely.

1916 Ariel Drive was an old brownstone that had seen much better days, Malone thought, about the year 1800. He paid off the cab driver and went up the steps slowly. Inside the first set of doors there was a row of bells marked for the various apartments. The second was marked: *2A: Strella/Ponson.* Malone pushed the bell.

After a second he heard the answering buzz and pushed open the next set of doors. A voice called down:

"Who's there?"

"It's me," Malone said.

The voice said nothing further. Malone climbed a flight of rickety stairs and found Betty Ponson waiting for him at the top.

She was eighteen or nineteen, a tiny girl with blonde hair and a slim figure. She was wearing a cotton dress, blue socks and a pair of flat-heeled shoes. "Who are you?" she said.

"My name's Malone," Malone said. "I'm here about your roommate."

"John J. Malone?"

"That's right."

"Then you're helping Al," Betty said. "Because Al's cousin knows you. Come on in."

Making about six mental notes, Malone followed Betty Ponson into a large single room at the head of the stairs. It was bright and sunny and neat; two daybeds served as couches, and there was a small record-player and a few shelves of books.

"Sit down," the girl said, and closed the door behind him. Malone chose the nearest couch, which was covered in yellow. The girl sat opposite him on the other couch. "Al didn't do it," she said.

"I thought you didn't know anything about Anne-Maria's boy friends," Malone said.

"Oh, that's what I told the police," Betty said. "I mean, why get involved with the police? If it would help Anne-Maria, sure —but none of the boys she went out with would do anything like that. Listen: I know."

Malone sighed. "Do you know any other boy she went out with?" he said.

"Oh, sure," Betty said. "Listen, do you want coffee or something? I think there's some beer left over from Saturday on the ice."

"Beer would be fine," Malone said.

He waited while she got a can, opened it and poured the contents into a tumbler. "I'm watching my weight," she said. "But you just go right ahead."

Malone drank deeply. "About those other boys," he said.

"Well," Betty said, "there was Greg—and what was the other one's name? Paul Jones. Greg Linnet and Paul Jones. I think I've even got the addresses somewhere—in Anne-Maria's address book, I mean, but the police didn't take it because I didn't let them know where it was." She took a breath and smiled at the little lawyer. When she smiled she was dazzlingly pretty.

"How long have you roomed with Anne-Maria?" Malone said.

Betty blinked. "Oh," she said. "Because I'm not all broken up and grief-stricken? Listen, I've had hours to get adjusted to this thing. It's terrible—and I just don't know who could have done it, because Greg and Paul are just like Al—they're just kids. Not the kind of people who go out and murder people. But it happened, and you've just got to live with it, is the way I figure. Crying isn't going to help Anne-Maria."

Malone said: "Did you know she was pregnant?"

"Not until the police mentioned it," Betty said. "The poor kid."

Malone thought, a little sadly, that nothing as unexpected as pregnancy would ever happen to Betty Ponson. Nothing at all, he told himself, would happen to Betty Ponson until she was good and ready for it to happen. He

didn't know exactly why that made him sad.

He took another swallow of beer.

"How about her parents?" he said.

"Anne-Maria's?" Betty shook her head. "They died in an auto accident last year. That was when we started rooming together. Listen, she just didn't have any relatives, nobody at all."

Malone nodded. "Just Greg Linnet and Paul Jones," he said, "and Al. Can I have their addresses?"

"Right away," Betty said. "Listen, I want to help, any way I can. I mean, when Al called I could see that I should have mentioned the other boys, but what could I do? If the police thought I was lying they'd just take me in, too, and what good would that do? But I guess I'm sort of responsible for Al's getting into jail—and I do want to help."

"The addresses," Malone said.

"You just sit there and finish your beer," Betty said. "I'll find that book of Anne-Maria's and bring it right back."

Greg Linnet lived, Malone found with some relief, with his mother. Not, he assured himself quickly, that he had anything against kids being independent and living their own lives. But it was getting a little monotonous.

He'd called first, and when he got to the small, white Lake Forest cottage Mrs. Linnet came out to meet him.

She was a white-haired, queenly woman dressed in regal ice-blue, a tall and commanding figure. Her voice went with the rest of her; it was precise, cool and poised.

"I understand you wish to see my son," she said.

"I just want to ask him a couple of questions," Malone said in what he hoped was a reassuring tone. "It's about a girl he knew."

"A girl?" Mrs. Linnet raised her eyebrows.

What did she think her son was like? Malone wondered. He allowed her to lead him into the house and through to a roomy, tastefully planned living room. She called up the flight of polished stairs: "Greg! Greg, dear!"

"What, mom?"

"The man who phoned is here now," Mrs. Linnet said. "He wants to see you."

"Be right down."

Mrs. Linnet turned to smile at the little lawyer. "I'm sure Greg will be able to tell you anything you want to know. About a girl, you said?"

"That's right," Malone said. "She was—"

The clatter of Greg Linnet descending the staircase interrupted further revelation. Greg was a tall, handsome, dark-haired boy who seemed to have a good deal more than the usual strength of

both limb and jaw. He grinned at Malone.

"You want to talk to me?"

"That's right," Malone said. "Maybe we'd better be alone."

Mrs. Linnet nodded in: "I'm sure that anything Greg has to say he can say in front of me. This girl—"

"What girl?" Greg said. "Is this about some girl?"

Malone nodded. "Do you know anyone named Anne-Maria Strella?" he asked.

Greg nodded. "Sure. Old Anne-Maria. Nice kid. Look, what's wrong?"

Malone closed his eyes. "Where were you last night?" he said in the most official tone he could manage.

"Hey," Greg said in an injured tone. "Don't I get to know what's happening? I've heard of you—you're John J. Malone. The criminal lawyer. Come on. Give with the facts or I don't answer a thing."

Malone thought of saying: "I'm asking the questions here," and thought better of it. There was nothing to do but tell the Linnets.

"Anne-Maria Strella was killed last night."

Mrs. Linnet said, softly: "My goodness." Greg didn't say a thing. He sat perfectly still, his face quite white under the black shock of hair. A long time passed before he shook his head, very slowly, from side to side.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I was just—kidding around. How can I help out?"

"We can start with the question I asked you," Malone said. "Where were you last night?"

"No place," Greg said. "I mean, right here in my room. Mom went out to a movie, so I just stayed home here, reading, watching TV. You know."

"Mrs. Linnet," Malone said, "what time did you arrive home?"

"I really don't know exactly," she said at once. "You see, I seldom keep any such precise eye on my comings and goings. I should say I arrived home between twelve and one."

"And—Greg—you were alone in the house until then?"

"That's what I said," the boy told Malone. "Look, Malone, can I ask one question? Who do they think did it? Who would do a thing like that?"

"I'm trying to find out who did it," Malone said. "I want to ask you about your relations with this girl. Maybe we'd better be alone."

"I'm sure I can hear anything Greg has to say," Mrs. Linnet said. "Can't I, Greg?"

Greg looked at his mother with a hopeless expression. "Oh," he said, "sure."

"If you don't mind," Malone said after a second, "I would like to talk to Greg alone. He can tell you all about it later."

Mrs. Linnet raised her eye-

brows, but gave no other sign of displeasure. She moved off to another room on the ground floor. Malone could see Greg's expression change to worried relief, instead of just worry.

"Mom's all right," the boy said. "But she thinks I'm a kid. That's all."

Malone said: "Sure." He waited a second. "How well did you know Anne-Maria?"

"She was a nice kid," Greg said. "Pretty hip, too. We went out a couple of times."

"She was pregnant when she died," Malone said.

Once again Greg took the news in perfect silence. At last he said: "That's why she was—killed, right?"

"That's what the police think," Malone said.

"And you think I—"

"I don't think anything," Malone said. "Not yet."

"Well, look," Greg said. "Maybe we—suppose I—or—well, look, Malone. It could have been me. It could have been. But I didn't kill her, Malone. That's for sure."

Malone shook his head. "Did anybody call you at home last night? Anybody come over?"

"I'm sorry," Greg said. "Nobody at all. I was home here, all by myself. But I didn't kill her, Malone."

"The police think a kid named Alphonsus might have done it," Malone said. He didn't know quite why he'd said that, but he knew he'd had a reason. Maybe something would happen.

But Greg only grimaced. "That would be Al," he said. "They really think he — hell, why would he? Anne-Maria and I were—we were going to be married, maybe. Maybe and maybe not; you know how it is. Kids."

"I know," Malone said.

"But Al, now," Greg said. "Why would he—"

"He was going with this girl, too," Malone said.

Very softly, Greg said: "You only find out about people when —it's too late. That's the way it is, isn't it, Malone?"

The little lawyer didn't answer. "I'll see you again," he said, and got up and started for the door.

Mrs. Linnet stopped him, appearing out of a doorway.

"I hope my son has been able to tell you what you wanted to know," she said.

"He's been very helpful," Malone said.

"Gregory is a fine boy," Mrs. Linnet said. "Raising a child alone has its difficult stages, but, seeing Greg nearly grown, I feel sure the effort has been worthwhile. His father died, you know, during World War II. He was an Infantry Captain."

There wasn't anything, Malone thought, to say to that.

"I hope you catch—whoever it is you're looking for," Mrs. Linnet said.

Malone said: "Thanks," and headed for the door.

There was still Paul Jones. But first he wanted to talk to Alphonsus. Malone thought about Joe the Angel's cousin waiting in jail —waiting for him, Malone, to come up with something that would get him out.

He didn't have a single idea what that something was going to be.

Alphonsus was a tall, thin boy who looked, Malone thought, like an Italian version of young Abe Lincoln. He was sitting on a cot in the jail cell, his long legs drawn up almost to his chin, and when he saw Malone he didn't even get up. He nodded glumly and went on staring at the floor.

"My name's Malone," the lawyer said. "Have a cigar." He drew out a couple of stogies from his breast pocket and offered one to the boy. But there was no response, not even a laugh.

"I'm here to help you," Malone said. He put the cigars back.

"Nobody's going to help me," Alphonsus said. "They got it into their heads I did this to Anne-Maria, and that's all there is to it. What's the difference anyway?"

"All they want is the truth," Malone said.

"Sure," the boy said without moving. "So they took me and locked me up."

"They—" Malone tried to think of what he was going to say, but he couldn't come up with anything helpful. Alphonsus was sunk in gloom, and there wasn't anything to do but wait until it passed. "Do you want to answer some questions?"

"I answered a million questions already," the boy said. "Why not do some more? Fire away."

Malone sighed. "How well did you know Anne-Maria?"

Alphonsus looked up for the first time. His eyes were black and burningly bright. "I was in love with her," he said.

"How well did you know her?"

"What are you getting at, Malone?"

The little lawyer sighed again. "All that I want to know is—"

The boy laughed; it was a short, sharp bark. "Was I sleeping with her? Is that what you mean?" Malone nodded. "We were going to get married. She wasn't that kind of girl."

Malone debated telling the boy about Anne-Maria's condition, and decided against it. "Where were you last night?" he said.

"Out with Anne-Maria," Alphonsus said.

"What?"

Alphonsus almost laughed again. "That's what my chem teacher keeps telling us," he said. "Don't jump to conclusions. Only you just jumped to one. No—she

was okay when I left her. That was about eleven."

"She met you a little after ten?"

"That's right."

"You weren't together long," Malone said.

"That's how it is," Alphonsus said. "So we had an argument. People have arguments — even married people, and we're not married yet. It wasn't serious. I was going to see her again tomorrow night."

"What did you do when you left her?"

"Walked around a little — cooling off, you know—and then I came home. I told the police about this already."

"Meet anybody when you were walking around?"

"Nobody I remember," Alphonsus said. "Look, Malone, I appreciate what you're doing. My cousin Joe put you up to this, didn't he?"

"I'm just looking for facts," Malone said diplomatically.

"Have it your way," the boy said. "But why don't you just mark me off as one of those juvenile delinquents—you know, all hip and ready with the knife—and let it go at that?"

"But—"

"The cops figure I did this thing, and that's that. They got me—why should they go looking for somebody else?"

"Police aren't all bad," Malone said soothingly, thinking of von Flanagan and wondering how much of the truth he was telling.

"Don't snow me," Alphonsus said. "I'm one of those juvenile delinquents—didn't you hear?—and there's nothing too bad for us."

Malone tried to think of something to say, but suddenly the boy's face lit up.

"Hey!" Alphonsus stood up—like a pocket ruler unfolding, Malone thought—and went past Malone to the door of his cell. He reached a hand out between the bars.

Malone turned to look. A small, fat blond boy was standing at the other side of the bars, looking confused and a little ashamed of himself.

"How'd you get down here, Paul?" Alphonsus said.

"I heard about you and I came down," the blond boy mumbled. "I thought you'd like visitors or something."

"Sure," Alphonsus said. "Sure. Hey, I want you to meet somebody." He waved at Malone. "This is John J. Malone. He's the lawyer. Friend of my cousin's."

"You got lawyers working for you?" the blond boy said.

"Oh, he's just asking questions," Alphonsus said. "Malone, this is my friend Paul Jones."

Malone stood up. "I'm glad to see you," he said with perfect truth.

"What kind of questions?" Paul Jones said.

"Questions?" Malone said.

"Al here says you're asking questions," the blond boy said, "and what I want to know is what kind."

Malone took a deep breath. "He didn't kill Anne-Maria Strella, and I'm trying to find out who did."

Alphonsus cut in: "I've told him the thing's hopeless. The police department picked me and that's all there is to that. But he says—"

"Maybe he can do something," Paul Jones interrupted. "After all, we know you didn't—kill the girl."

Malone said: "Wait. Wait. Wait a minute."

The boys were looking at him silently. "That's better," he said. "I want to ask your friend here a couple of questions, too, Alphonsus. If you don't mind."

"Sure," Alphonsus said. "Go ahead. Have yourself a time."

Malone turned to the blond boy. "You knew Anne-Maria, too, didn't you?"

"Me?"

"That's what her roommate says," Malone told him. "She says you went out with the girl."

Paul Jones tried to grin. He looked at Alphonsus, but the tall boy's face was turned away. "We have to talk about it here?" Paul said.

Malone turned to Alphonsus. "Suppose we leave you alone for a little while?" he said.

"It's okay," Alphonsus muttered. "Makes no difference."

Malone shook his head. He called for someone to open the cell door, and went out into the corridor with Paul Jones. They stood in a little alcove some distance from the cells.

"Now," Malone said. "About the girl—"

"Well, look," Paul Jones said. "Al was going with her, too. Like he was hung on the chick—"

"Hung?"

"He was attached to her. He liked her. And I don't think he knew about me. I mean, this chick was going with everybody around. Me and Al and a fellow named Greg—"

"I know about Greg," Malone said.

"So I went with her," Paul said. "What does that make me?"

"I don't know," Malone said honestly. "Where were you last light?"

"Last night?"

"That's right," Malone said.

Paul thought for a second. "I was home."

"You live with your parents?"

"Who," Paul said with astonishment, "me?" He shook his head. "My folks are in Hammond, Indiana. I live up here alone. I'm going to school here—that's how I know Al in the first place."

"Then you were home all alone?" Malone said.

He closed his eyes for a second. This was, he realized, turning into a beautiful mess. Everybody, it seemed, had a motive for killing Anne-Maria Strella. Or, he amended, might have a motive. And nobody had an alibi.

"I wasn't alone," Paul said. "There were three or four kids with me. Four, it was."

"Can I check with them?"

"You want to check, check," Paul said. "I'll give you their addresses."

"When did the party break up?" Malone said.

"You mean, when did they leave?" Paul said.

"That's right." Malone wondered if he were talking English. Then he wondered if Paul were talking English.

Oh, well, he thought. It didn't really matter.

"Two o'clock," Paul said. "Maybe near three. I wasn't counting."

"Not before two?" Malone said.

"Not before two," Paul told him.

So Paul Jones had an alibi. Malone considered it. Would four other boys lie for a friend of theirs?

Even when you found an alibi, Malone discovered, it didn't do you any good.

"About the girl," he said.

"Anne-Maria?"

"That's right," Malone said wearily.

"A real hip chick. Very hip indeed."

"How well did you know her?"

"How well?"

Malone decided not to say anything this time. He merely nodded slowly.

"I took her out twice," Paul said. "That's all."

Malone took a deep breath and said: "She was pregnant when she died."

Paul looked at the little lawyer, openmouthed. "You're kidding," he said.

Malone said: "Did you have anything—to do with that?"

Paul blinked and shook his head. "Never," he said. "Impossible."

"You're sure?"

Paul laughed. "What a question, man. I'm sure."

Malone sighed.

There was only one person who admitted he had the obvious motive for killing Anne-Maria Strella. And that person didn't have an alibi, either. It was suddenly very simple—except for one little thing.

Malone had a feeling. There was, he felt, some small thing he'd heard and then forgotten, something that explained the whole affair and left nothing to guesswork.

He didn't know what it was.

All he knew was that it defi-

nitely cleared his only suspect of the murder.

It was early evening by the time he arrived back at Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar, but the City Hall watchman was still there, crouched over his beer as if he were a stone statue. Joe was washing glasses in preparation for the evening rush, but he dried his hands and shut off the water when he saw the little lawyer.

"Malone!" he said. "You have cleared him? He is not in jail any more?"

"He's still in jail," Malone said disconsolately.

"But he gets out soon?" Joe insisted. "Tonight? Tomorrow?"

Malone shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "What I ought to do is go straight to von Flanagan and tell him about Greg Linnet. But that isn't right either, because Greg didn't kill Anne-Maria, only I don't know why." He stopped and looked up at the bartender. "What am I talking about?" he said plaintively.

"What you need," Joe said firmly, "is a drink. No—I put it on your tab." He busied himself behind the bar for a minute and returned with a glass of gin and a beer chaser. Malone stared at them as if they had suddenly come from Mars.

"Drink," Joe the Angel said.

Obediently, Malone drank. He put down the empty gin glass, then the half-empty beer glass, and sighed heavily, brushing absently at his tie. "Everything would be very simple if I knew what it was," he said.

"What was what?" Joe asked him.

Malone said: "What?"

Joe shook his head. "Never mind," he said. "Start again from the beginning. There is a man named Splinter—"

"Linnet," Malone said automatically. "Greg Linnet. And he's not a man. He's nineteen."

"Nineteen? But—"

"He was going out with Anne-Maria too," Malone said. He noticed the half-empty glass of beer and finished it. "And it looks as if he did it."

"What about the note, Malone?" Joe said. "The note someone left with—her body?"

"Note?" Then he remembered. "Oh. *This chick was pretty groovy but I had to get her out of the way.*"

"Who wrote the note?" Joe said.

"Nobody knows," Malone said. "I don't know. You don't know. Your cousin Alphonsus doesn't know."

"But, Malone—" Joe swallowed and began again. "You don't understand how I feel, Malone. You must help me. My cousin—my own family—"

Malone stared at him. "What did you say?" he whispered.

"My cousin," he said. "My

own family. You must help me, Malone. But—"

"Never mind," Malone said. "Tell me: did your cousin ever call any girl 'groovy'?"

"Gravy?"

"Groovy. Like the note."

"No, he did not." Joe was decisive. "He used strange words —once he called a girl *hip,* I remember, and I asked him what he meant. Hip, yes. Groovy, no."

"That's what I was trying to remember," Malone said. "Hip, yes. Groovy, no. Joe—Joe," Malone shouted, "you're an angel."

He was gone before Joe could open his astonished mouth.

A week later, nothing seemed to have changed in Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar. Of course, Joe himself was a good deal less nervous and preoccupied. But the City Hall watchman at the end of the bar didn't seem to care.

Malone drank deeply and put his glass down on the bar. "It was very simple," he said. "As soon as I remembered what I knew I hadn't forgotten—let's start over." He took a deep breath. "I thought only the three boys had any kind of motive. But there was another motive."

"Mrs. Linnet," Joe put in.

"That's right," Malone said. "Greg's mother—who only wanted to protect Greg. Maybe he told her about Anne-Maria's being pregnant. Maybe she found it out some other way—she won't say. And it doesn't matter. She didn't care about Anne-Maria; she only wanted to protect Greg. So she went out—while she was supposed to be 'at the movies,' and killed the girl."

"But Anne-Maria told her roommate that she had a date with a boy friend."

"Maybe Mrs. Linnet called up and gave her a message from Greg," Malone said. "Maybe she said Greg would be waiting on a certain street-corner—only when Anne-Maria got there Greg's mother was waiting instead."

"Okay," Joe said. "But how did you know, Malone?"

"The note," Malone said. "She was trying to cover herself. She wanted to make it look as if one of the other boys Anne-Maria went out with had done the job. But she got the slang wrong. 'Groovy' is pretty much out of date now."

Joe shook his head. "Malone," he said, "it was wonderful."

"Nothing at all," Malone said modestly. "I was glad to be of help."

"I must pay you," Joe said.

"But—"

"Ah," Joe said. He went to the register and drew out a slip of paper. "Your tab," he explained to the little lawyer. He tore it ceremoniously into small pieces and let them flutter to the floor.

Malone said: "I really didn't expect—"

"My pleasure," Joe the Angel

said. "Besides, I have another problem."

"Another one?"

"It is Alphonsus again," Joe said sadly. "I have always said that living alone with a roommate is not living at all. And the children get crazy ideas—Malone, he is in love."

"Again?"

Joe sighed. "He met the girl after he was released from jail. And what I want to know, Malone—"

"Tell him to take his time," Malone said. "He ought to wait another week anyhow."

"I tell him, Malone," Joe said helplessly.

"Oh, and by the way," Malone said. "I looked it up. You were right."

"I was right?"

Malone relaxed. It was going to be a pleasant evening. Joe the Angel's cousin was free; the case was closed; and his tab at Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar was gone. He could begin the long, delightful process of building up a new, and even larger tab.

"You were right," he said. "Zev won the Kentucky Derby in 1923. Morvich won it in 1922."

NEXT MONTH—

Raffles takes part in a fantastic cricket match, in
Barry Perowne's RAFFLES AND THE SILVER DISH

The Ringer blackmails a blackmailer, in
Edgar Wallace's THE COMPLETE VAMPIRE

A Young Turk leader clashes with the Double Four, in
E. Phillips Oppenheim's MISSION OF MAJOR KOSUTH

An unusual killer is hunted, in
Wilbur Daniel Steele's BLUE MURDER

A millionaire's son is kidnapped, in
Arthur Somers Roche's SHEILA GREY, PRIVATE DETECTIVE

and

THE ELEMENT OF DOUBT

A NEW SAINT STORY BY LESLIE CHARTERIS

— in THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

the brain workers

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Simon Templar believed in practising what he preached —to do others as they would do you, before they began . . .

"HAPPY" FRED JORMAN was a man with a grievance. He came to his partner with a tale of woe.

"It was an ordinary bit of business, Meyer. I met him in the Alexandra—he seemed interested in horses, and he looked so lovely and innocent. When I told him about the special job I'd got for Newmarket that afternoon, and it came to suggesting he might like to put a bit on himself, I'd hardly got the words out of my mouth before he was pushing a tenner across the table. Well, after I'd been to the 'phone I told him he'd got a three-to-one winner, and he was so pleased he almost wept on my shoulder. And I paid him out in cash. That was thirty pounds—thirty real pounds he had off me—but I wasn't worrying. I could see I was going to clean him out. He was looking at the money I'd given him as if he was watching all his dreams come true. And that was when I bought him another drink and started telling him about the real big job of the day. 'It's honestly not right for me to be letting you in at all,' I said, 'but it gives me a lot of pleasure to see a young sport like you

THE SAINT WAS NEVER TOO BUSY TO BE INTERESTED IN LESSER BRETHREN AMONG THE UNGODLY—USUALLY TO THEIR REGRET

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From: THE BRIGHTER BUCCANEER

winning some money,' I said. 'This horse I'm talking about now,' I said, 'could go twice round the course while all the other crocks were just beginning to realize that the race had started; but I'll eat my hat if it starts at a fraction less than five to one.' I said."

"Well?"

"Well, the mug looked over his roll and said he'd only got about a hundred pounds, including what he'd won already, and that didn't seem enough to put on a five-to-one certainty. 'But if you'll excuse me a minute while I go to my bank, which is just around the corner,' he said, 'I'll give you five hundred pounds to put on for me.' And off he went to get the money—"

"And never come back," said the smaller speaking part, with the air of a Senior Wrangler solving the first problem in a child's book of arithmetic.

"That's just it, Meyer," said Happy Fred aggrievedly. "He never came back. He stole thirty pounds off me, that's what it amounts to—he ran away with the ground-bait I'd given him, and wasted the whole of my afternoon, not to mention all the brain work I'd put into spinning him the yarn—"

"Brain work!" said Meyer.

Simon Templar would have given much to overhear that conversation. It was his one regret that he never had the additional pleasure of knowing exactly what his pigeons said when they woke up and found themselves bald.

Otherwise, he had very few complaints to make about the way his years of energetic life had treated him. "Do others as they would do you," was his motto; and for several years past he had carried out the injunction with a simple and unswerving wholeheartedness, to his own continual entertainment and profit. "There are," said the Saint, "less interesting ways of spending wet weekends . . ."

Certainly it was a wet weekend when he met Ruth Eden, though he happened to be driving home along that lonely stretch of the Windsor road after a strictly lawful occasion.

To her, at first, he was only the providential man in the glistening leather coat who came striding across from the big open Hirondel that had skidded to a standstill a few yards away. She had seen his lights whizzing up behind them, and had managed to put her foot through the window as he went past—Mr. Julian Lamantia was too strong for her, and she was thoroughly frightened. The man in the leather coat twitched open the nearest door of the limousine and propped himself gracefully against it, with the broken glass crunching under his feet. His voice drawled pleasantly through the hissing rain.

"Evening, madam. This is Knight Errants Unlimited. Anything we can do?"

"If you're going towards London," said the girl quickly, "could you give me a lift?"

The man laughed. It was a short soft lilt of a laugh that somehow made the godsend of his arrival seem almost too good to be true.

An arm sheathed in wet sheepskin shot into the limousine—and Mr. Lamantia shot out. The feat of muscular prestidigitation was performed so swiftly and slickly that she took a second or two to absorb the fact that it had indubitably eventuated and travelled on into the past tense. By which time Mr. Lamantia was picking himself up out of the mud, with the rain spotting the dry portions of his very natty check suit and his vocabulary functioning on full throttle.

He stated, amongst other matters, that he would teach the intruder to mind his own unmentionable business; and the intruder smiled almost lazily.

"We don't like you," said the intruder.

He ducked comfortable under the wild swing that Mr. Lamantia launched at him, collared the raving man below the hips, and hoisted him, kicking and struggling, on to one shoulder. In this manner they disappeared from view. Presently there was a loud splash from the river bank a few yards away, and the stranger returned alone.

"Can your friend swim?" he inquired interestedly.

The girl stepped out into the road, feeling rather at a loss for any suitable remark. Somewhere in the damp darkness Mr. Lamantia was demonstrating a fluency of discourse which proved that he was contriving to keep at least his mouth above water; and the conversational powers of her rescuer showed themselves to be, in their own way, equally superior to any awe of circumstances.

As he led her across to his own car he talked with a charming lack of embarrassment.

"Over on our left we have the island of Runnymede, where King John signed the Magna Carta in the year 1215. It is by virtue of this Great Charter that Englishmen have always enjoyed complete freedom to do everything that they are not forbidden to do . . ."

The Hirondel was humming on towards London at a smooth seventy miles an hour before she was able to utter her thanks.

"I really was awfully relieved when you came along—though I'm afraid you've lost me my job."

"Like that, was it?"

"I'm afraid so. If you happen to know a nice man who wants an efficient secretary for purely secretarial purposes, I could owe you even more than I do now."

It was extraordinarily easy to talk to him—she was not quite sure why. In some subtle way he succeeded in weaving over her a fascination that was unique in her experience. Before they were in London she had outlined to him the whole story of her life. It was not until afterwards that she began to wonder how on earth she had ever been able to imagine that a perfect stranger could be interested in the recital of her inconsiderable affairs. For the tale she had to tell was very ordinary—a simple sequence of family misfortunes which had forced her into a profession amongst whose employers the Lamantias are not so rare that any museum has yet thought it worth while to include a stuffed specimen in the catalogue of its exhibits.

"And then, when my father died, my mother seemed to go a bit funny, poor darling! Anyone with a get-rich-quick scheme could take money off her. She ended up by meeting a man who was selling some wonderful shares that were going to multiply their value by ten in a few months. She gave him everything we had left; and a week or two later we found that the shares weren't worth the paper they were printed on."

"And so you joined the world's workers?"

She laughed softly.

"The trouble is to make anyone believe I really want to work. I'm rather pretty, you know, when you see me properly. I seem to put ideas into middle-aged heads."

She was led on to tell him so much about herself that they had reached her address in Bloomsbury before she had remembered that she had not even asked him his name.

"Templar — Simon Templar," he said gently.

She was in the act of fitting her key into the front door, and she was so startled that she turned around and stared at him, half doubtful whether she ought to laugh.

But the man in the leather coat was not laughing, though a little smile was flickering round his mouth. The light over the door picked out the clean-cut buccaneering lines of his face under the wide-brimmed filibuster's hat, and glinted back from the incredibly clear blue eyes in such a blaze of merry mockery as she had never seen before . . . It dawned upon her, against all her ideas of probability, that he wasn't pulling her leg . . .

"Do you mean that I've really met the Saint?" she asked dizzily.

"That's so. The address is in the telephone book. If there's anything else I can do, any time—"

"Angels and ministers of grace!" said the girl weakly, and left him standing there alone on

the steps; and Simon Templar went laughing back to his car.

He came home feeling as pleased as if he had won three major wars single-handed, for the Saint made for himself an atmosphere in which no adventure could be commonplace. He pitched his hat into a corner, swung himself over the table, and kissed the hands of the tall slim girl who rose to meet him.

"Pat, I have rescued the most beautiful damsel, and I have thrown a man named Julian Lamantia into the Thames. Does life hold any more?"

"There's some mud on your face, and you're as wet as if you'd been in the river yourself," said his lady.

The Saint had the priceless gift of not asking too much of life. He cast his bread with joyous lavishness upon the waters, and tranquilly assumed that he would find it after many days—buttered and thickly spread with jam. In his philosophy that night's adventure was sufficient unto itself; and when, twenty-four hours later, his fertile brain was plunged deep into a new interest that had come to him, he would probably have forgotten Ruth Eden altogether, if she had not undoubtedly recognized his name. The Saint had his own vanity.

Consequently, when she called him one afternoon and announced that she was coming to see him, he was not utterly dumbfounded.

She arrived about six o'clock, and he met her on the doorstep with a cocktail shaker in his hand.

"I'm afraid I left you very abruptly the other night," she said. "You see, I'd read all about you in the newspapers, and it was rather overpowering to find that I'd been talking to the Saint for three-quarters of an hour without knowing it. In fact, I was very rude; and I think it's awfully sweet of you to have me."

He sat her down with a dry Martini and a cigarette, and once again she felt the strange sense of confidence that he inspired. It was easier to broach the object of her visit than she had expected.

"I was looking through some old papers yesterday, and I happened to come across those shares I was telling you about—the last lot my mother bought. I suppose it was ridiculous of me to think of coming to you, but it occurred to me that you'd be the very man who'd know what I ought to do about them—if there is anything that can be done. I've got quite a lot of nerve," she said, smiling.

Simon slipped the papers out of the envelope she handed him and glanced over them. There were ten of them, and each one purported to be a certificate attributing to the bearer two hundred £1 shares in the British Honduras Mineral Development Trust.

"If they're only worth the paper they're printed on, even that ought to be something," said the Saint. "The engraving is really very artistic."

He gazed at the shares sadly. Then, with a shrug, he replaced them in the envelope and smiled. "May I keep them for a day or two?"

She nodded.

"I'd be frightfully grateful." She was watching him with a blend of amusement and curiosity; and then she laughed. "Excuse me staring at you like this, but I've never met a desperate criminal before. And you really are the Saint—you go about killing dope traffickers and swindlers and all that sort of thing?"

"And that sort of thing," admitted the Saint mildly.

"But how do you find them? I mean, if I had to go out and find a swindler, for instance—"

"You've met one already. Your late employer runs the J. L. Investment Bureau, doesn't he? I can't say I know much about his business, but I should be very surprised if any of his clients made their fortunes through acting on his advice."

She laughed.

"I can't think of any who have done so; but even when you've found your man—"

"Well, every case is taken on its merits; there's no formula. Now did you ever hear what happened to a bloke named Francis Lemuel—"

He amused her for an hour with the recital of some of his more entertaining misdeeds; and when she left she was still wondering why his sins seemed so different in his presence, and why it was so impossible to feel virtuously shocked by all that he admitted he had done.

During the next few days he gave a considerable amount of thought to the problem of the Eden family's unprofitable investments; and since he had never been afflicted with doubts of his own remarkable genius, he was not surprised when the course of his inquiries produced a possible market which had nothing at all to do with the Stock Exchange. Simon had never considered the Stock Exchange anyway.

He was paying particular attention to the correctly rakish angle of his hat preparatory to sallying forth on a certain morning when the front door bell rang and he went to open to the visitor. A tall saturnine man, with white moustache and bushy white eyebrows, stood on the mat, and it is an immutable fact of this chronicle that he was there by appointment.

"Can I see Captain Tombs? My name—"

"Is Wilmer-Steak?"

"Steck."

"Steck. Pleased to meet you. I'm Captain Tombs, Step in,

comrade. How are you off for time?"

Mr. Wilmer-Steck suffered himself to be propelled into the sitting-room, where he consulted a massive gold watch.

"I think I shall have plenty of time to conclude our business, if you have enough time to do your share," he said.

"I mean, do you think you could manage to wait a few minutes? Make yourself at home till I come back?" With a bewildering dexterity the Saint shot cigarette-box, matches, pile of magazines, bottle of Peter Dawson, and siphon on to the table in front of the visitor. "Point is, I absolutely must dash out and see a friend of mine. I can promise not to be more than fifteen minutes. Could you possibly wait?"

Mr. Wilmer-Steck blinked.

"Why, certainly, if the matter is urgent, Captain—er—"

"Tombs. Help yourself to anything you want. Thanks so much. Pleased to see you. Bye-bye," said the Saint.

Mr. Wilmer-Steck felt himself wrung warmly by the hand, heard the sitting-room door bang, heard the front door bang, and saw the figure of his host striding past the open windows; and he was left pardonably breathless.

After a time, however, he recovered sufficiently to help himself to a whisky-and-soda, and a cigarette, and he was sipping and puffing appreciatively when the telephone began to ring.

He frowned at it vaguely for a few seconds; and then he realized that he must be alone in the house, for no one came to take the call. After some further hesitation, he picked up the receiver.

"Hullo," he said.

"Listen, Simon—I've got great news for you," said the wire. "Remember those shares of yours you were asking me to make inquiries about? Well, it's quite true they were worth nothing yesterday, but they'll be worth anything you like to ask for them tomorrow. Strictly confidential till they release the news, of course, but there isn't a doubt it's true. Your company has struck one of the biggest gushers on earth—it's spraying the landscape for miles around. The papers'll be full of it in twenty-four hours. You're going to pick up a fortune!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Wilmer-Steck.

"Sorry I can't stop to tell you more now, laddie," said the man on the wire. "I've got a couple of important clients waiting, and I must see them. Suppose we meet for a drink later. Berkeley at six, what?"

"Ah," said Mr. Wilmer-Steck.

"Right-ho, then, you lucky old devil. So long!"

"So-long," said Mr. Wilmer-Steck.

He replaced the receiver carefully on its bracket, and it was

not until several minutes afterwards that he noticed that his cigarette had gone out.

Then, depositing it fastidiously in the fireplace and helping himself to a fresh one, he turned to the telephone again and dialled a number.

He had scarcely finished his conversation when the Saint erupted volcanically back into the house; and Mr. Wilmer-Steck was suffering from such profound emotion that he plunged into the subject of his visit without preamble.

"Our directors have gone carefully into the matter of those shares you mentioned, Captain Tombs, and I am happy to be able to tell you that we are prepared to buy them immediately, if we can come to an agreement. By the way, will you tell me again the exact extent of your holding?"

"A nominal value of two thousand pounds," said the Saint. "But as for their present value—"

"Two thousand pounds!" Mr. Wilmer-Steck rolled the words almost gluttonously round his tongue. "And I don't think you even told us the name of the company."

"The British Honduras Mineral Development Trust."

"Ah, yes! The British Honduras Mineral Development Trust! . . . Naturally our position must seem somewhat eccentric to you Captain Tombs," said Mr. Wilmer-Steck, who appeared to have only just become conscious of the fact, "but I can assure you—"

"Don't bother," said the Saint briefly.

He went to his desk and flicked open a drawer, from which he extracted the bundle of shares.

"I know your position as well as you know it yourself. It's one of the nuisances of running a bucket-shop that you have to have shares to work on. You couldn't have anything more worthless than this bunch, so I'm sure everyone will be perfectly happy. Except, perhaps, your clients — but we don't have to worry about them, do we?"

Mr. Wilmer-Steck endeavored to look pained, but his heart was not in the job.

"Now, if you sold those shares for, let's say, three hundred pounds—"

"Or supposing I got five hundred for them—"

"If you were offered four hundred pounds, for instance—"

"And finally accepted five hundred—"

"If, as we were saying, you accepted five hundred pounds," agreed Mr. Wilmer-Steck, conceding the point reluctantly, "I'm sure you would not feel you had been unfairly treated."

"I should try to conceal my grief," said the Saint.

He thought that his visitor appeared somewhat agitated, but he never considered the symptom

seriously. There was a little further argument before Mr. Wilmer-Steck was persuaded to pay over the amount in cash. Simon counted out the fifty crisp new ten-pound notes which came to him across the table, and passed the share certificates over in exchange. Mr. Wilmer-Steck counted and examined them in the same way.

"I suppose you're quite satisfied?" said the Saint. "I've warned you that to the best of my knowledge and belief those shares aren't worth a fraction of the price you've paid for them—"

"I am perfectly satisfied," said Mr. Wilmer-Steck. He pulled out his large gold chronometer and glanced at the dial. "And now, if you will excuse me, my dear Captain Tombs, I find I am already late for an important engagement."

He made his exit with almost indecent haste.

In an office overlooking the Haymarket he found two men impatiently awaiting his return. He took off his hat, mopped his forehead, ran a hand over his waistcoat, and gasped.

"I've lost my watch," he said.

"Damn your watch," said Mr. Julian Lamantia callously. "Have you got those shares?"

"My pocket must have been picked," said the bereaved man plaintively. "Yes, I got the shares. Here they are. It was a wonderful watch, too. And don't you forget I'm on to half of everything we make."

Mr. Lamantia spread out the certificates in front of him, and the man in the brown bowler who was perched on a corner of the desk leaned over to look.

It was the latter who spoke first.

"Are these the shares you bought, Meyer?" he asked in a hushed whisper.

Wilmer-Steck nodded vigorously.

"They're going to make a fortune for us. Gushers blowing oil two hundred yards in the air—that's the news you'll see in the papers tomorrow. I've never worked so hard and fast in my life, getting Tombs to—"

"Who?" asked the brown bowler huskily.

"Captain Tombs—the mug I was working. But it's brain that does it, as I'm always saying . . . What's the matter with you, Fred—are you feeling ill?"

Mr. Julian Lamantia swivelled round in his chair.

"Do you know anything about these shares, Jorman?" he demanded.

The brown bowler swallowed.

"I ought to," he said. "I was doing a big trade in them three or four years ago. And that damned fool has paid five hundred pounds of our money for 'em—to the same man that swindled me of thirty pounds

only last week! There never was a British Honduras Mineral Development Trust till I invented it and printed the shares myself. And that—that—"

Meyer leaned feebly on the desk.

"But listen, Fred," he pleaded. "Isn't there some mistake? You can't mean— After all the imagination and brain work I put into getting those shares—"

"Brain work!" snarled Happy Fred.

EDGAR WALLACE AND THE CURTAINS

IF YOU ARE AT ALL interested in the world around you, and in people as people—rather than as names in a card-index, you will attract to yourself all sorts. . . . Edgar Wallace, whose story, THE COMPLETE VAMPIRE, appears in *The Saint* next month, in addition to being a good listener, with the writer's warm interest in the offtrail and the unusual, had this often rather embarrassing ability.

A valuable pair of curtains was stolen in Brussels in the early twenties and smuggled into England in the luggage of a friendly jockey. Once back in London, the jockey, by then rather nervous, passed them on to a friend, a little crook and small-time thief who was well known to Wallace. By now the police knew that the stolen curtains were in London and the little man was, understandably, rather embarrassed by his sudden possessions—until he hit on a method of hiding them.

He took them around to Edgar Wallace, told him that he'd been such a good friend of his that he wanted to do something for him, so would Edgar please accept these nice old curtains which had belonged to his dear old mother. Wallace, touched, agreed. Except for a few days, when Edgar and the thief had a slight disagreement and Edgar sent the curtains back to the little man who promptly, panicky, came around with them, tears streaming down his face, insisting that he hadn't been able to sleep all night thinking about the quarrel—the curtains were hung in the Wallace drawing room, admired by all.

Eventually the hue and cry died down. By this time the little man was doing rather well, and decided he might as well leave the curtains where they were. It wasn't until years afterwards that he finally told the startled Wallace the *truth* about his dear old mother's curtains. . . .

error at daybreak

by . . . Carter Dickson

Kane was a power in the city —and a swindler—but he was genuinely fond of this girl who stood accused of murder.

UNDER the white light of daybreak, the beach seemed deserted for a full halfmile towards the headland. The tide was out, showing a muddy slope at the foot of smooth sand. But it had begun to turn, and flat edges of surf moved snakily back towards the beach.

A narrow lane led down to it, between the high and crooked banks which closed it off from the road. Until you were well out on the sands it was impossible even to see Norman Kane's cottage some distance up towards the right. But one landmark showed in a dark wedge against sand and sea. For several hundred yards out into the water a line of rocks ran in humped formation, curved at the end, in a way that suggested the paw of an animal. It seemed to catch at the incoming tide. Bill Stacey knew it at once for the Lion's Paw, and he set off down the lane towards the beach.

It is to Stacey's credit that he still felt moderately cheerful after having just tramped two miles on an empty stomach, carrying a heavy suitcase. Norman Kane had specified the train he was to take

Carter Dickson obviously needs no introduction to any mystery reader. Here is another of his unusual stories about Colonel March and his curious Department of Queer Complaints which, as March once said, does get the strangest cases — even most accidentally, as happens this time.

From: Carter Dickson's THE DEPARTMENT OF QUEER COMPLAINTS
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from London, and the wayside station at which it would land him. But Kane had said nothing about a certain lack of transport at that hour of the morning.

The prospect of seeing Marion —Kane's niece and secretary—so cheered him that he forgot the matter. He did not know whether Kane knew he was in love with Marion. Norman Kane had for him the slightly amused tolerance with which Kane would naturally regard an easy-going journalist like Stacey. And Stacey, in turn, had concealed from a hero-worshipping Marion his belief that Norman Kane was an imposing, dignified, and strenuous crook.

For in his way Kane was a great man, a power in the City and a company-juggler of skill. And he was genuinely fond of Marion, as he was of all his dependents. With his theatricalism went tireless energy; it was only at Dr. Hastings' orders, when he had developed signs of a bad heart, that he had been dragged off for the summer to South Wales.

Heart trouble, Stacey knew, was often the case with these ex-athletes who have run to fat. Kane's worried looks, had disturbed him the last time he saw them. But, as he came out on the beach in the morning light, he felt that nothing ever could happen to Kane.

There was the man himself. Even at a distance he recognized Kane's bulky figure, jauntily wrapped in a dark-red bath-robe with white facings, striding along with a towel over his arm, kicking the sand out of his way with rubber slippers. His bath-robe made a spot of color against that lonely shore, where the Lion's Paw stretched out into the tide.

And Kane strode out briskly along the Paw. He was not going to bathe. He was going out along the rocks to dive.

"Here!" Stacey said aloud. Swimming, in that sea, with a bad heart? The mutter of the surf was growing as it drove in, and the farther end of the Paw was already awash.

"Ahoy there!" he yelled. "Kane! Hoy!"

The cry seemed to linger in emptiness across the sands. But it reached Kane, who turned round. He was some fifty yards out on the ridge, but he lifted his towel and waved it.

"Ahoy, my lad!" he bellowed back. "I didn't expect you so early. Come for a dip! The water's fine. Every thing is—"

Then it happened.

Stacey never forgot that big grayish-haired figure, framed against the sea and the dark crook of the Lion's Paw. He was too far away to catch the expression on Kane's face. But Kane's voice died away in a gulp, a puzzled kind of gulp, and his shoulders drew together. For a moment he stood looking at the beach, sway-

ing a little and pressing his arms as though he were cold. Then he pitched forward on his face like a bag of sand.

It was a second or two before Stacey began to run. As he did so he noticed other figures moving on the beach. From some distance away to the right, in the direction of Kane's cottage, he saw Marion running towards him. There was a gleam on her yellow hair; she wore a bathing-suit and a beach-robe blown out by the wind. Behind her lumbered Dr. Hastings, in a white linen suit.

But Stacey did not wait for them. He knew instinctively that something had happened to Norman Kane; something that was worse than a faint.

Along the top of the Lion's Paw there had been worn a natural sunken path some two feet wide. Picking his way out across this, he found Kane's great bulk wedged into it. Kane's right hand, still clutching the towel, was doubled under him; his left hand lay limply outstretched ahead. Stacey took his pulse, but there was no pulse.

He stood staring down, listening to the slap and swing of the water against the rocks. Heart gone: just like that. At that moment he did not notice the small hole or tear in the back of the dark-red bath-robe, just over the heart. He was too dazed to notice anything more than the fact of death. He hurried back to the beach, where he met Marion and Dr. Hastings.

"Steady," he said, as the girl tried to push past him. "You'd better go out there, doctor. But I'm afraid he's done for."

None of them moved. He could not quite estimate the effect of his words on Kane's niece. He realized, too, that he had never before seen Marion without her glasses, which had added a business-like and almost prim touch to her good looks. Over her shoulder towered Dr. Hastings, whose wiry, close-cut hair had a Teutonic look, and his expression a Teutonic heaviness.

"Oh!" said the girl. She was looking at him curiously, and she breathed hard. "Was it—suicide?"

"Suicide?" repeated Stacey, startled. "No. His heart gave out. Why should you think it was suicide?"

"Oh!" said Marion again. She put her hand on his arm and pressed it. "I want to see him. No, I'm quite all right. I hope I can move. I can't think very well."

Dr. Hastings, who seemed about to launch a violent protest, checked himself and pushed past. They went with him to the body, and watched while he made his examination. Then he urged them back towards the beach.

"Look here," Hastings began heavily. He cleared his throat, and tried again. "Yes, he's dead right enough; but possibly not for the

reason you think. Do you know if Lionel is up yet, Marion?"

So that fellow was at the cottage, thought Stacey. He had never liked the supercilious and aesthetic Mr. Lionel Pell. Norman Kane had once courted Lionel's mother, in the days before she had married the late Mr. Pell; and this seemed to give Lionel the idea that he had some claim on Kane, particularly with regard to sponging.

"Lionel?" repeated Marion. "I —I haven't seen him. I got up and went out for an early bathe at the other side of the bay. But I shouldn't think he was up yet. Why?"

"Because," replied Dr. Hastings with his usual directness, "he'll have to get out his car and drive to the village and get the police. I'm afraid this is murder."

The surf was driving in now, with deepening thunder. A wave veered against the rocks and flung up a ghostly mane of spray. A cold wind had begun to blow from the south, fluttering Marion's beach-robe. She looked at the doctor with rather blind blue eyes, winking as though to keep back tears.

"We had better go up to the house," Hastings went on heavily, "and get something to use as a stretcher: he's a weight to move. There are some bad cross-currents out at this distance when the tide rises, and we don't want him washed out to sea before the police get here."

Then Stacey found his voice.

"The police? Good God, what do you want with the police? His heart—"

"His heart was as sound as yours or mine," said Hastings.

"So," said Marion, "you knew that."

"I should hope I knew it, my dear girl. I happen to be his doctor. Now keep your chin up and let's face the facts. He's been murdered. What little blood there is doesn't show up well against that dark-red bath-robe; but you probably noticed it. And you may have seen the cut in the back of the bath-robe just over the heart."

Stacey put his arm round Marion, who had begun to tremble. He spoke with restraint.

"Look here, Doctor. I don't like to suggest that you're out of your mind, but you might come aside and talk nonsense to me instead of talking it to her. Murdered? How could he have been murdered? He was all alone in this path. There wasn't anybody within a hundred yards of him. You must have seen that for yourself."

"That's true," put in Marion suddenly. "I was sitting up at the top of the beach, up under the bank, getting dry; and I saw him go past. That is true, Doctor."

"Yes. It is true. I saw him from the veranda of the cottage," agreed Hastings.

"Then why all this talk about

murder?" asked Stacey. "Hold on! Are you saying he was shot with a long-range rifle, or something of the sort? It would have to be very long range. His back was towards the sea when he was hit, and there were several miles of empty water behind him."

"No, I am not saying that."

"Well?"

"He was killed," answered Dr. Hastings slowly, "with some kind of steel point like an old-fashioned hatpin. That's what I think, anyhow. I haven't removed it. And I can't swear to the exact nature of the weapon until the post-mortem."

That afternoon, while the gray rain fell, Superintendent Morgan tramped up to the cottage. He had joined the quiet group assembled inside the veranda—Marion, Dr. Hastings, Lionel Pell, and Bill Stacey sat there. Outside, the sea looked oily and dangerous, as though by its restless movements it were about to burst against the cottage. Superintendent Morgan wore a sou'wester and an oilskin cap; the expression of his face was a contrast to his soft voice.

He glared at Dr. Hastings.

"And that's that," he said. "I'm suggesting to you, Doctor, that you did this deliberately."

"You mean," asked Hastings, examining all sides of the matter, "that I killed Mr. Kane?"

"That is not what I mean. I mean, that you deliberately allowed that body to be washed out to sea. Don't worry. We'll find it. Indeed we will. That was an incoming tide, and it's somewhere along the beach." The superintendent's light eyes opened. His sing-song voice was more disturbing than violent. "I say you deliberately let it be carried off so that we shouldn't find out how Mr. Kane was killed."

"Miss Kane and Mr. Stacey," said Hastings shortly, "will tell you I warned them. I wanted to get a stretcher and move him in time. We were too late, that's all. Why shouldn't I want you to find out how he was killed?"

"Because it's an impossible thing you tell us. The man was alone. No one could have touched him. And yet he was stabbed. There was a way of doing that. If we had found the body we should have known how it was done."

"Probably you would have," agreed Hastings.

There was an ominous silence, broken by the flat drizzle of the rain. Bill Stacey, sitting beside Marion, did not look at the superintendent. He found himself more curious about another person, a man who lounged across the veranda near the doorway.

The stranger weighed some seventeen stone and his waterproof made him seem even larger. From under a sodden tweed cap a bland blue eye surveyed the company; and from under a cropped mustache, which might be sandy or

gray, there projected a large-bowled pipe, at which he seemed to be sniffing. Stacey had heard the superintendent address him as Colonel March. Colonel March listened, but so far had said nothing.

"Meantime," said Superintendent Morgan, taking out a notebook, "there are more queernesses here. I want to hear about them, if you please. Miss Kane!"

Marion glanced up briefly. She had been holding herself in well, Stacey thought, and preserving her blank, "secretarial" manner.

"We've heard a good deal, hereabouts," Morgan went on, "about Mr. Kane and his bad heart. You tell us you knew he didn't have a bad heart at all."

"I guessed it. So did Dr. Jones in the village, I think."

"Then why did he keep on saying he had?" demanded Morgan.

"I—I don't know."

"Then tell me this, miss. When you first heard this morning that Mr. Kane was dead, you asked whether it was suicide. Why did you ask that?"

"I—"

"Truth, miss!"

"I've been worried about him," answered Marion. "He's been threatening suicide, if you must know. And he's been acting queerly."

Lionel Pell intervened. Lionel's way of speaking, which sometimes made him as unintelligible as a gramophone running down, now became almost clear. His long legs were outthrust; and his usual expression of supreme indifference was now replaced by one almost helpful. He sat back, long of nose and jaw, and laid down his pronouncement.

"The word, I believe, is 'childish,' " he decided. "The poor old boy—Norman, of course—has been playing with toys. Tell them about the cardboard soldiers, Marion. And the air-rifle."

Marion gave him an almost malevolent look.

"There's nothing very funny or childish about the air-rifle. It's a powerful one, hardly a toy at all. You've used it yourself. But I admit I don't understand about the soldiers.

"You see," she appealed to Morgan, "only the night before last my uncle came home with a huge box of cardboard soldiers. He bought them in Cardiff. They were gaudily painted, each of them five or six inches high. In the bottom was a wooden cannon, painted yellow, that fired a hard rubber ball. My uncle went back to his study and unwrapped them, and set them up on the table."

At this point, Stacey noticed, the man called Colonel March stirred and glanced across with sudden interest. They all saw it; it brought a new atmosphere of tension. The superintendent looked at her with quick suspicion.

"Did he, Miss Kane? Did he

seem to be—er—enjoying himself?"

"No," she replied quite seriously. "He looked ill. Once he came out, for no reason at all, and begged my pardon."

"Miss Kane, do you mean your uncle was insane?"

Dr. Hastings interposed. "Norman Kane," he said, "was one of the sanest men I ever met."

"Now I will tell you something myself," said Superintendent Morgan. "He 'begged your pardon,' you say. You talk of suicide. I have heard of your Mr. Kane from my cousin, Morgan David. My cousin tells me that your Mr. Kane was not much better than a swindler. My cousin says his companies are crashing, and that he was going to be prosecuted. Is that a reason for suicide? I think it is."

"I know nothing of my uncle's private affairs," said Marion. And yet it was, Stacey felt, the thing she had been fearing. Marion wore a print frock, and she seemed less like a secretary than a nurse—a nurse at the bedside of a patient who she had determined should not die.

"Is that, I ask you, a reason for suicide?"

"It may be a reason for suicide," snapped Dr. Hastings. "But it won't explain how a man could run himself through the back at an angle his hand couldn't possibly reach—and in full sight of three witnesses as well."

"Murder or suicide, it is still impossible!

"And yet the man is dead."

"One moment," said Colonel March.

It was an easy, comfortable voice, and it soothed tempers frayed by rain and fear. His presence was at once authoritative and comfortable, as though he invited them to a discussion rather than an argument; and his amiable eye moved round the group.

"It's not my place to butt in," he apologized, "but there are one or two things here that are rather in my line. Do you mind, Superintendent, if I ask a question or two?"

"Glad," said Morgan fervently. "This gentleman," he explained, throwing out his chest, "is the head of D3 Department at Scotland Yard. He is down here—"

"—on not a very exciting errand," said Colonel March sadly. "A matter of a curious thief who steals only green candlesticks, and therefore comes under the head of our special investigation department. Excuse me: Miss Kane, two days before he died your uncle bought a box of cardboard soldiers. Will you get me that box of soldiers now?"

Without a word Marion got up and went into the cottage. Dr. Hastings looked up suddenly, as though on the defensive.

"We have also heard," Colonel March continued presently, "that

he bought an air-rifle. I think you used that air-rifle, Mr. Pell?"

Lionel sat up. With the superintendent he had been friendly and helpful. With Colonel March he had adopted his usual indifference, the air of ease and right with which he (at twenty-three) had called Kane "Norman" and conferred a favor by accepting loans.

"I have used it," he said. "It was not my property. Are you under the impression that our late good host was killed by being shot with one of those microscopic pellets out of a toy air-rifle? Or, for that matter, by a little rubber ball out of a toy cannon?"

"Where was the air-rifle kept?"

You could not shake Lionel's placidity.

"I believe I kept it in my room. Until last night, that is. Then I lent it to Marion. Hadn't you better ask her?"

Marion returned in a few moments, with a large and bright-colored box, which she handed to Colonel March. She seemed to feel that her name had been mentioned, for she looked quickly between Lionel and Bill Stacey. Colonel March opened the box, sniffing at his pipe.

"And yet," he said, with a sharpness which made Stacey uneasy, "the rubber ball is gone. Where, I wonder, is the air-rifle now? You borrowed it, Miss Kane?"

"Look here—" interrupted Dr. Hastings, with an oddly strained expression. He got up from his chair and sat down again.

"Yes, I borrowed it," Marion answered. "Why? Didn't I tell you? I took it out with me when I went to swim this morning, at the other side of the cottage. I shot a few meat-tins and things, and then put it down. When I came back to this side of the beach I must have forgotten it."

She stared at them, her eyes widening.

"I'm afraid it'll be ruined, in all this rain. I'm sorry. But what of it? Is it important?"

"Miss Kane," said Colonel March, "do you usually go out for a swim as early in the morning as that?"

"No. Never. Only I was horribly worried about my uncle. I couldn't sleep."

"You were fond of him?"

"Very fond of him," said Marion simply. "He had been very good to me."

Colonel March's expression seemed to darken and withdraw. It was as expressionless as his ancient cap or his ancient pipe, and he said nothing. But he closed the box of soldiers with great care, and beckoned the superintendent to one side. They had not long to wait for the result.

Late that afternoon a body was washed up on the shore two miles below Barry Island. And Marion Kane was detained for questioning at the police station, as a prelude

to formal detention on a charge of murder.

Stacey spent one of the worst nights of his life. He told himself that he must keep calm, that he must resist the impulse to telephone wildly for solicitors, invade the police station, and generally make a nuisance of himself. He realized wryly, that he was not a strong, silent man like Dr. Hastings.

In difficulties he wanted to do something about them, if only to adopt the dubious course of hitting somebody in the eye.

Things would be all right, he assured himself. Kane's own solicitor was coming from London, and the police were fair. But this very feeling that the police were fair disturbed him worst of all. After a sleepless night at the cottage he dozed off at dawn, and came downstairs at ten o'clock. Lionel Pell was coming up the veranda steps with a newspaper. It was still raining, and so dark that Dr. Hastings had lighted the oil-lamps in the living-room.

"Here's their case," said Lionel, holding up the newspaper. "Our superintendent has been talking indiscreetly. It's plastered all over the world."

"Their case? Their case against—?"

Stacey had to admit that his opinion of Lionel had changed. Lionel had no affectations now; under press of trouble he was only lanky and awkward and human.

"Well, they don't mention her name, of course. She's not officially under arrest. It's very carefully worded. But they appear to have found that air-rifle buried in the sand at the top of the beach under the bank. They found it at the exact place where Marion says she was sitting when old Norman fell, and in an almost direct line with the Lion's Paw.

Against the lamplight from one of the living-room windows appeared Dr. Hastings's head. It was only a silhouette with wiry cropped hair, but they saw his knuckles punch on the window-sill.

"I don't know anything about it," Lionel urged hastily. "I was in bed and asleep when it happened. But you recall, Bill, that until you came well out on the beach yesterday morning you couldn't see Marion at all. You were in the little lane. Dr. Hastings couldn't see her either. He was on the veranda here, and this cottage is set well back behind the line of the bank.

"If Norman were shot in the back, particularly with a weapon like that, he wouldn't feel it the moment he was hit. People don't, they say. He would hear a hail from Bill Stacey, and turn round. Then he would fall forward with the weapon in his heart—"

From the window Hastings uttered a kind of growl.

"The weapon?" he said. "As a

matter of academic interest, will you tell me just what an air-rifle has to do with this, anyhow?"

"Oh, come! You won't be able to dodge responsibility like that, Doctor," said Lionel, who always dodged responsibility.

"Dodge—?"

"Yes. It's your fault. You were the one who suggested that the wound was made by a point and shaft like an old-fashioned hat-pin?"

"Well?"

"Those air-rifles, you know; they're pretty powerful. Hardly like a toy at all. But sometimes the lead pellets stick in the barrel and clog it. So as a rule the makers give you a very thin, light rod to clean the barrel with. If you cut off about three-quarters of the rod, and sharpen the other end to a needle-point, you would have a short missile that could be fired with very damaging force in the ordinary way."

There was a silence, except for the noise of sea and rain. Stacey walked to the end of the veranda.

"I've heard rot before," he said, as though making a measured decision. "But never in my life. . . . Do you realize that there's no air-rifle powerful enough to carry any kind of missile with enough force to kill at a distance of well over fifty yards?"

"Yes, I know," admitted Lionel. "But you see the trouble?"

"No, I don't."

"It's just plausible," said Lionel. "I don't believe it. It only worries me."

"I want my hat," said Dr. Hastings suddenly. "Where's my hat? This can't go on; I won't have it. I'm going down to the police station and tell them what really happened."

Outside the cottage there was a rustle of footsteps in the gloom. It was so dark that they could barely see the two persons who came up the steps, but Dr. Hastings picked up a lamp inside the window and held it so that the light fell on Colonel March and Marion Kane.

Colonel March was wheezing a little, but as bland as ever. Marion's expression could not be read. There was relief in it, and disillusionment, and even peace; despite the signs of recent emotion, she was smiling.

"I should like a cigarette, please, Bill," she said. Then she took his arm. "Thank heavens," she added, "for an ordinary decent human being."

"The superintendent and I," said Colonel March, "have come to apologize. Of course, we did what we did entirely with Miss Kane's consent. We have concocted a fiction and kept on the lee side of libel. We have set a trap and heard it snap. We have given you all, I fear, a bad night. But it was the only way we could bring the corpse back to tell his own story. . . . You had better come up now, Mr. Kane."

It was a very muddy, shamefaced, and glowering corpse who walked up the steps behind Superintendent Morgan. Norman Kane, whose heart had stopped beating more than twenty-four hours ago, was now very much alive; and looked as though he wished he weren't.

Norman Kane's gray-haired dignity did not sustain him. He seemed undecided whether or not to hide behind Superintendent Morgan. For a moment he stood opening and shutting his hands. Then he caught sight of Dr. Hastings standing in the window, holding up the lamp.

"You traitor," he roared, and flung himself at the doctor.

"He was dead," insisted Stacey. "His heart had stopped; I'll swear to that. How did he manage it?"

On a clear, cool morning after the rain, Marion, Stacey, and Colonel March stood on the beach looking at a new tide. Colonel March frowned.

"You had better hear the story," he said. "Kane was wrong in nearly everything; he was wrong in the way he flared out against Dr. Hastings. Hastings is his friend, and only tried to help him when his pig-headed piece of deception would have been discovered in two minutes.

"You will already have guessed the fact which Miss Kane feared. Norman Kane was heading for a bad financial smash. It might not necessarily mean prison, but it would mean ruin and penury. Kane did not like such embarrassments. So he planned to stage a fake death and disappear, with a good sum laid by. Other financiers have been known to do it, you know," Colonel March added dryly.

Marion shied a pebble at the water and said nothing.

"He was going to 'die' and have his body washed out to sea —never to be found," the colonel went on. "But he did not want either the stigma of suicide or the prying investigation of a murder. So, with the assistance of Dr. Hastings, he arranged to die of heart failure on Lion's Paw. There had to be an independent witness there to swear to his death: you, Mr. Stacey. You were summoned for that purpose. Hastings had to be there to corroborate you. Then Hastings would shepherd you to the cottage, many hundred yards away, as the tide rose. Kane, a supremely powerful swimmer, could let himself into the water, swim out and round to the headland, and disappear.

"So for a long time he gabbled everywhere about his weak heart. But he would not listen to Hastings, who told him it was very risky. Miss Kane knew that his heart was not weak. Even the village doctor knew it. If Kane, therefore, suddenly dropped dead of a complaint he did not have, there would be a strong suspicion

of fraud at the start. It was altogether a foolish plan. Even so it might have gone through if, on the very morning chosen for the 'death' Miss Kane had not decided to get up for an early swim.

"She was not accustomed to getting up early, as she told us. Norman Kane and Dr. Hastings thought they would have the whole beach to themselves at that hour, except for their special witness: a young man of—er—unsuspicious nature."

Stacey looked at Colonel March gloomily.

"For 'unsuspicious,' " he said, "read 'imbecile.' Very well; but I was in full command of what faculties I have, Colonel. I know when a man is dead. And I tell you his heart had stopped."

"I beg your pardon," beamed Colonel March. "His heart had not stopped. But his pulse had stopped."

"His pulse?"

"You will recall how he was lying. Flat on his face, with his right hand doubled under him, but his left hand stretched out invitingly. He was also lying wedged in a kind of trough; and you know his enormous weight. To move him and get at his heart would be difficult and awkward. You would never try to do it, with that limp hand stretched out toward you. You would automatically feel the pulse at his wrist. And there was no pulse."

"But how the dickens can you stop a pulse? It's the same as a heart."

"You stop it," said Colonel March, "by means of a small, hard, rubber ball, such as the little one supplied with the toy cannon in the box of soldiers. It is a good trick, which was exhibited before a group of doctors in London some time ago—and it worked. At the same time it is so simple that I suggest you try it for yourself. Kane, of course, got it from Dr. Hastings. The small rubber ball is placed under the armpit. The arm is pressed hard against the side, the flow of blood is cut off, and the man is 'dead.' Kane lay with his upper arm against his side, but with his lower arm from elbow to wrist extended for your inspection. That is all.

"Even so, the whole plan almost crashed, because Miss Kane appeared on the scene. You, Mr. Stacey, had found the body and announced death from heart failure. But Hastings knew that this would never do. Miss Kane strongly suspected that the weak heart was a sham.

"If the body had already been swept out to sea, if she had come on the scene only afterwards, she might have wavered. She might have been uncertain. She might have thought it was suicide, which they tried to conceal from her under a mask of heart failure. But there was the body. If something were not done quickly, she would have insisted on examining it.

And it would never do for her to find a living man."

Marion nodded. She was still shaken from the after-effect of a somewhat bitter hoax, but she thrust out her chin.

"I certainly should have!" she said. "Only the doctor—

"Diverted your attention. Exactly. He is an ingenious fellow, Hastings; and no wonder he was upset that morning. He diverted it in the only possible way, with a sudden clap of violence and murder. He drew you hastily back to the beach, so that Kane should not overhear. He shocked you out of your wits, which made it easy for him to put ideas into your mind.

"Remember you never actually *saw* any trace of a wound or a weapon. All you saw was a very minute tear in the back of the dressing-gown, where it had been skagged on a nail.

"That tear (he admits) put the idea into his mind while he was making his 'examination.' To account for such a very small puncture, and such a complete absence of blood, he had to think of some weapon corresponding to that description, so he postulated something like an old-fashioned hatpin. He could have said it was suicide, of course. But he knew that a man could neither stab himself in the back at that angle, in the presence of witnesses, nor press such a weapon so far into the flesh as to be invisible. Whereas it was just possible that a thin blade might have been projected or fired by a murderer. It was altogether too possible. Dr. Hastings had acted wildly and unwisely on the spur of the moment, to prevent the discovery of his friend's hoax. But he must have grown somewhat ill when he saw the case we spun out of a completely harmless air-rifle."

Colonel March smiled apologetically.

"It was a very weak case, of course," he said, "but we had to bring the corpse back. We had to have something—suggestive, but non-committal and non-libellous—to stare at Kane from the Welsh newspapers. It had to be done before he got away to the Continent, or we might never have caught him. The discovery of a drowned body, washed up at Barry, was very helpful; it aided the illusion with which we might snare Kane. The matter was suggested to Miss Kane, who agreed . . ."

"Agreed?" cried Marion. "Don't you see I had to know whether . . . I have looked up to him all my life. I had to know whether he could cut and run just the same if he thought I might be hanged for his murder."

"Which he did not do," said Colonel March. "Mr. Norman Kane, I think, has had a refreshing shock which will do him no harm. I should like to have seen

him when he crept into town last night; when he found that he was not dead of heart failure and washed out to sea, but that his murdered body had been found and his niece was accused of having killed him. No wonder he burst out at Hastings. But what did he do? He must have realized, Miss Kane, that this charge against you would sooner or later be shown as nonsense; and yet he came back. It was a decent thing to do, as decent as the thing you did yourself. I think it likely that, if he faces his difficulties now, he will save himself as he thought he was saving you."

BERLIN SPY WAR

NEW TACTICS were enlivening Berlin's spy jungle as we went to press, with the Communist espionage bosses proving that a smear campaign involving a Nazi past could be more dangerous to public figures in West than in East Germany. The "Union of Democratic Lawyers," operating from three dusty rooms in a dilapidated building in East Berlin, brought about the resignation of Dr. Theo Friedenau, head of the West Berlin "Investigating Committee of Free Lawyers," well-known abroad as the West German representative of the International Association of Lawyers, doing this by publishing documents which appeared to prove that the attorney had never taken a law degree—though he'd practiced as a lawyer in East Germany before fleeing to the West eight years ago, *and* that he'd been a leading official of the Hitler Jugend.

What is interesting about this is that Dr. Friedenau's Committee had just released details about the far greater number of former Nazis who hold high posts in East Germany—where public opinion can't oust them. The Investigating Committee has for several years operated an effective and widespread spy network, penetrating everywheres in East Germany. As a result, considerable information has reached the West about the internal affairs of the East German government and Communist circles, to the understandable distress of East Berlin State Security chief Mielke.

Proof that the East German security police do not limit themselves to counter-espionage and occasional kidnappings, is the interesting campaign of harassment of Dr. Friedenau and his associates carried on by Mielke's men during the past year. Undertakers, complete with hearse and wreaths, would turn up at his house; fireworks and "leaflet bombs" would be let off under his windows; tons of coal would be dumped on his doorstep by duped West Berlin coal dealers; and, the other day, a West Berlin delicatessen got an order to deliver enough food and drink to his house for a party of a hundred people. . . . Granted that all this sounds rather mild, but it all adds up in a war of nerves. . . .

death in the king's room

by . . . Sax Rohmer

There was evil in the air and there was a shocking explanation for the reappearance of the Minstrel.

"I REGRET," said Malcolm Brissard, "that the family ghost has disappointed; but there is still time."

We were a party of five. The dining-room of Laley Old Place had been built for a banqueting hall, and marooned around that island of light in a sea of shadows we seemed to be oddly cut off from reality. Malcolm Brissard at the head of the table had Laroo on one side and Buzzy on the other. Aylmer, Malcolm's cousin, and myself, made up the party.

Buzzy, as Brissard spoke, looked curiously from face to face.

I could see him studying the clean-cut features of Malcolm Brissard, tanned by years in the African veldt, the pale and more refined face of his cousin in which, nevertheless, a distinct family likeness might be traced.

Laroo, wearing a green dinner frock—she knew that green suited her dark beauty admirably—was staring right ahead into the shadows. Malcolm Brissard was staring at Laroo. Buzzy glanced

We meet Bazarada, the most amazing magician the world has known since that morning in February, 1796, when it was announced that Cagliostro had died, and "supple, creamy-skinned Laroo, with eyes like shadowed violets"—and learn their adventures as they explore England's half-world.

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at me and smiled his thin-lipped smile.

"I don't despair," he said, his clear, cold voice echoing weirdly about the huge room. "I have enjoyed every moment of my stay."

"It has been grand to have you here," Brissard assured him; but it seemed to me that the words were addressed to Laroo.

"I have always wanted to live in a haunted house," Laroo murmured dreamily.

The fact that Laley Old Place was haunted accounted for our presence there that night. The death of Burton Brissard, head of the Brissard Steamship Company, who had died unmarried some six months before, had brought about a great change in the fortunes of his nephew, our host. The eccentric old man had instructed his solicitors to destroy his will only a few days before a heart attack carried him off. Hence Malcolm Brissard's sudden accession to fortune—for he was next of kin.

"The traditional ghost of Laley Old Place," he continued in his enthusiastic, almost boyish way, persistently glancing at Laroo, "is the Laley Minstrel, of course. On certain occasions he is reported to have been seen coming out from the trees beyond the orchard where at one time there was a chapel, and walking towards the house. Records on the subject report that he melts into the stone wall of the west wing."

"I'd just love to see him," Laroo murmured, "or hear him."

"Aylmer here," Brissard went on, turning to his cousin, "has the whole thing pat. You see, he stayed in the office; in fact, he was Uncle Burt's right-hand man whilst I was wandering about Africa. What's the story of the west wing, Aylmer?"

"It's really very curious," Aylmer Brissard replied, "because it is fairly well authenticated." He had a cultured but tired voice, a contrast to the brusque and rather harsh tones of his cousin. "The west wing is the earliest part of Laley Old Place, and the Laley family to whom it belonged for generations—a family now extinct—had a pretty lurid history. There used to be a secret staircase at the point where the ghost disappears, leading to the room now known as the Armoury. This staircase has been built up for generations."

Bazarada and Brissard had struck up a firm friendship on the liner in which they had both returned from South Africa. A few weeks later, Brissard having entered into occupation of Laley Old Place and Bazarada concluding an engagement in Manchester, we found ourselves assembled here at Brissard's request, to investigate the reappearance of the Laley Minstrel—a phantom who

had long ceased to trouble the house.

"It will take me years to know this place as Aylmer knows it," said Malcolm. "Even now I can't believe that it belongs to me! On my instructions he went to work and had done a hundred and one things even before I got back from Africa. There was no electric light, for example. Every room is properly lighted now. There's still no central heating—and we need it in the Peak district. But that's a big job and will have to wait awhile."

"I understand," said Bazarada, "that Kemp, the butler, was here for a great part of your late uncle's time?"

"Yes, sir," Aylmer replied; "Kemp is an old servant of the family. Burton Brissard had a flat in London, and spent more time there than he did in Derbyshire. Kemp and his wife—she acted as cook-housekeeper—often had the place to themselves for months on end."

I started violently. The atmosphere of that huge dining-room, perhaps, was getting on my nerves. From just behind me came a dry cough!

As I twisted around in my chair:

"As you say, Mr. Aylmer," a soft voice broke in, "we have been much alone in the old house."

It was Kemp, the butler, who had entered unseen, unheard. With his scanty gray hair, regular features and slight side-whiskers, he was so like a traditional butler that I found it hard to believe in him.

Bazarada, facing me across the table, fixed his strange eyes upon the man who stood at my elbow, and:

"Did you ever see or hear anything unusual during that time?"

"Nothing, sir. It was often very difficult to keep up the house staff because of the queer stories they got to hear. My wife and myself have sometimes been quite alone in Laley Old Place. Nothing ever happened. I never heard or saw a thing until two weeks ago to-night, when I was serving Mr. Malcolm, who was dining alone."

"You'll have to get out of the way of calling me Mr. Malcolm," said our host laughingly.

"Yes, sir, I shall. It's just a habit. But on that night, sir, as you remember—"

"Remember!" cried Malcolm. "Can I ever forget! I've heard it twice since, too!"

"I know the story," said Bazarada quietly, "but I should like to hear your version of it, Kemp."

"Well, sir, it was certainly the Laley Minstrel. I am afraid that it so affected me that I dropped something!"

"Yes!" said Malcolm shortly, "gravy!"

"It was like a kind of harping, sir! It seemed to be here, there

and everywhere. It was certainly somewhere in this room."

"Was it unpleasant?" Bazarada went on.

"Well, sir, I couldn't say it was unpleasant. In a sort of way it was beautiful. But it was—well—very uncanny!"

He set upon the table a salver laden with decanters and liqueurs.

"By the way," said Bazarada turning to Aylmer, "have you got that old plan of the house I asked you to find for me?"

"Yes," Aylmer replied; "it's upstairs on my desk." He beckoned to the butler. "Slip up to the Armoury, Kemp, for me; there's a very large envelope on the desk—you can't mistake it. Bring it down, and"—as Kemp turned to go—"shut the window while you're there. The wind is rising."

The butler went out as silently as he had come in. In the circumstances, there was no question of the one lady guest retiring. When cigars and cigarettes were passed around, Laroo selected, and Malcolm lighted, a Turkish cigarette. Bazarada watched her under drooping eyelids.

"That's your last to-night," he said grimly. "You are getting to smoke like a factory chimney."

Laroo gave Buzzy a venomous glance, and leaning back in her chair so that she was almost in shadow, made a contemptuous *moue* which necessitated the use of the tip of her tongue, with a grace which I should not have supposed possible in such a gesture.

Aylmer Brissard stood up.

"Excuse me for a moment," he said, smiling, "but I have just remembered that I locked the plan in the safe before dressing for dinner."

He went out.

"I have heard that damnable harping three times," Malcolm said in a low voice. "Twice in the Green Room and once here. Kemp is right about its character. It's musical in a way—but there's no shape or form about it. It's the most ungodly—"

Abruptly he ceased speaking—so abruptly that I was reminded of what would happen if a man were to be suddenly gagged.

An icy silence descended upon us all. I experienced a momentary shudder—a chilling of the blood. For some reason I fixed my eyes on Bazarada—looking to him alone.

For in upon the silence broke a sound unlike any I had ever heard—in that place and at that time a ghostly, unbelievable thing. Preceded by a howling, like the howling of wind, it came. At one moment it resembled soft playing upon several violins, then it died away to a weird whisper . . . It increased again. So also did the wailing. It was like a phantom church organ. It rose and fell as though the Laley

Minstrel crept around us in the shadows . . .

In its beauty terror lay.

I saw that Bazarada was watching Laroo.

"Buzzy! Oh, my God! What is it?"

There was a moment of electric tension, and then I heard a door opening. I saw Malcolm Brissard staring past me. The sound of phantom harping had died away.

"Did you hear it, Kemp?" he cried sharply.

"Yes, sir," the butler replied. "I was on my way down from the Armoury when I heard it. I'd been looking for the long envelope."

Aylmer's voice came from a distant doorway.

"Sorry, Kemp—I had locked it away. I went up by the other stair. I heard the Minstrel, too as I came down."

"That makes the fourth time!" said Malcolm. He turned to his cousin. "You never heard this abominable harping, or whatever it is, during the years that you lived here?"

"Never," Aylmer replied. He appeared to be much disturbed by the uncanny occurrence. "It's quite new to me—and very horrible. In any old house there are queer noises—old timbers, wind in the crannies and so forth; but this thing is"—he repeated the word—"horrible."

Laroo had stolen around to Buzzy. Clutching his arm, she stood very close to him.

"What is it?" she whispered. "I'm sorry I'm frightened, Buzzy, because I know you think that nobody should ever be frightened. But it's made me feel like an icebox."

Kemp had remained. Aylmer had set a long envelope on the table beside Bazarada. I think we were all recovering our composure somewhat. There was complete silence now in the big, shadowy room.

"You have always heard this sound here, in this dining-room?"

Bazarada's cool voice was a sedative.

"Once here before, sir, yes."

It was the butler who answered.

"But I have heard it twice in my bedroom!" said Malcolm. "If I hear it again I'll have to quit! Aylmer had prepared the King's Room for me. It's the room in which Charles II is said to have slept on his way to the Battle of Worcester. My uncle used it—but it's too imposing for me! All the same, if I can't rest in the Green Room it will have to be the King's Room."

Bazarada was the sworn enemy of hocus-pocus. He had studied Voodoo in Africa and in Haiti, had consorted with fakirs and mahatmas. He admitted the existence of forces inherent in humanity but undeveloped by most

of us. Apart from certain cases which he considered belonged to another category, he was unprepared to accept ghostly manifestations.

"I am afraid some of the staff heard it to-night, sir," Kemp continued, "and so I fear, except for my wife and myself, that you will be without service tomorrow."

Aylmer shook his head. He looked more than usually pale, I thought. The queer manifestation which had so upset Laroo seemed also to have disturbed him very much.

"We have sounded the walls and panels at that end of the room," he said in a low voice; "and although there seems to be a space behind the woodwork, we found no means of entry."

"Did the same in the Green Room," Malcolm jerked. "Short of stripping down to the timbers, it would be impossible to explore behind."

Bazarada stood where the light of one of the table lamps reflecting up from the polished surface lent his face a quality which was almost satanic. His heavy lids were lowered, so that his eyes were merely slits.

"Perhaps, Laroo," he said, "our host would be good enough to look after you for half an hour."

Laroo stepped back and stared at him wide-eyed.

"Buzzy! You're not going to leave me out on this thing? Do I have to spend my time listening for harps?"

But Bazarada was adamant.

"Laroo—be quiet!" He turned to Malcolm Brissard. "It may seem discourteous in a guest, but you have asked me to inquire into this matter and I must do it in my own way. Possibly you and Aylmer might pass the time with a game of snooker. Laroo plays a fair game." He nodded in the direction of the billiard-room. "But I should be glad if you would permit my friend Maurice and myself to retire for a short consultation. I am deeply interested—and I want to make further investigations."

Bazarada sat on the side of my bed hugging one upraised knee. He stared at me and his stare was disconcerting.

"I am very glad, Maurice," he said, "that I chanced to meet Malcolm on the way home from South Africa."

"Well"—I hesitated—"he has certainly made us welcome. He is naturally bothered about these uncanny manifestations. Do you think you can help him?"

"I *know* that I can help him," he replied quietly. "This thing is right in my province."

"You mean there is some explanation, other than a supernatural one?"

"I think so."

"It is more than horrible. Laroo was terrified."

"Laroo was entitled to be terrified. As you say, Maurice, it is more than horrible. Were you ever in the Malay country?"

This abrupt question came as a shock.

"No. Why?"

"Well — if you weren't — it doesn't matter. I may take it that you never heard of the Singing Reed?"

"The Singing Reed? No — what is it?"

"In my opinion, Maurice, it's something curiously like the Laley Minstrel!"

I stared, but could think of nothing to say.

"I have been at some pains," Bazarada went on—"I started my inquiries before I left Manchester—to obtain all particulars about Laley Old Place. It belongs without doubt to the somewhat extensive list of haunted houses in the Peak district of Derbyshire. The Laley Minstrel dates back to the Middle Ages. His harping is supposed to herald the death of someone in the house. I have read up his record. And I hope"—he held up the long envelope which contained the old plan—"to learn even more from this."

"You seem to know quite a lot already."

"When Malcolm's invitation reached me in Manchester I set inquiries afoot, immediately. I have studied this sort of thing for years, and I have sources to which I can go. Then I wired you. Here we are!"

I stood up from the armchair in which I was seated, crossed the room and threw open the window. It overlooked the orchard to which Malcolm had referred during the evening, and beyond which formerly there had been a chapel. I stared out.

From selected points, Laley Old Place was visible for miles around—it stood upon a considerable eminence. South of the orchard at which I was looking the ground fell away very steeply, for instance; so that, turning my head slightly to the left, I could see the tops of trees in the valley below. They swayed in a wind which had sprung up after sunset.

Came Bazarada's voice from behind me.

"What direction is the wind, Maurice?"

"Westerly, I should say."

"It's always westerly when the Minstrel plays . . ."

I turned sharply.

"What do you mean?"

"I got exact dates from Malcolm and I called up the Air Ministry. On all three occasions when the Minstrel had been heard, there was wind . . . and the wind was a west wind!"

"Possibly a coincidence."

Bazarada's top lip tightened.

"And possibly not! You notice that wide ledge to the left of your window, Maurice? It ends

at a balcony—the balcony of the room known as the Armoury—now used by Aylmer as a workroom. Four feet below the balcony is a red-tiled penthouse roof. The building is a potting shed. There's a pipe from there to a rainwater tank below. It's an easy way down and an easy way up. Wear tennis shoes."

"You mean—"

"I mean that when everyone is safely asleep I will meet you outside the potting shed."

We went into the billiard-room, which opened out of the haunted dining-room. Laroo lay on a settee half in shadow, her chin cupped in one hand and high heels raised in the air. She was disinterestedly watching the play and steadily munching chocolates. It was pretty dull for her, I thought, but the players had nearly finished their game.

Bazarada suggested that when the last two balls had been potted it might be a good idea to turn on the radio. Malcolm was enthusiastically in favor.

"Reception is bad about here," he said; "it seems to be a sort of blind spot on this slope. Aylmer has been tinkering with it for weeks, haven't you, old man?"

"Yes," Aylmer Brissard replied vaguely, and missed the shot which gave Malcolm the game.

We returned to a rather barely furnished lounge which occupied a great part of the south front, and although, as our host assured us, reception was poor, we managed to pick up some dance music. Malcolm was a keen dancer, and in Laroo he certainly had a charming partner.

Aylmer danced only once. I smoked my pipe and watched Bazarada.

He was seated in an armchair studying the scene under drooping eyelids. When presently we broke up for the night, Laroo, who had been allotted a spacious double bedroom, insisted that Mrs. Kemp should occupy the second bed.

"After all I heard to-night," she said, "I just couldn't close my eyes. I should see harps everywhere, even if I didn't hear them."

Back in my room I prepared for my meeting with Bazarada. As the party had separated for the night:

"Look out for me from your window," he had whispered. "It won't be before midnight. My route is more tricky than yours, and I have to be careful."

It was just half-past eleven when I turned out my light, got my pipe going and leaning from the window surveyed the route which I must follow.

Heavy clouds were blowing up and the moon was obscured. I had a torch in my bag and I slipped it into my pocket. The orchard, in the changes of light brought about by passing clouds,

presented a truly ghostly appearance. Little stretch of imagination was demanded to create the figure of a ghostly minstrel flitting through the trees.

I wondered what Bazarada suspected.

The atmosphere of Laley Old Place stimulated grotesque thoughts. I think I should have felt uneasy under that roof even failing the uncanny music which had broken up our dinner party. Buzzy's evident conviction that he could explain the phenomenon amazed me. I could conceive of no human agency being responsible for that disturbance.

I settled down to await Buzzy's summons. He had particularly instructed me to have all lights out, and I suppose in smoking my pipe I was not obeying strictly.

Odd creaking sounds, unaccountable sounds, disturbed the quiet of Laley Old Place. Such noises are common to all ancient buildings—as Aylmer Brissard had said—and normally can be explained; but the Laley Minstrel, an apparition apparently well authenticated, could not be so readily explained. Had I not that very night heard his wild harping?

In consequence, as I waited, keenly alert, the slightest atmospheric cracking of the old furniture in my room, the faintest sound from the corridor outside, the sighing of the trees below—these were magnified and became ghostly menaces.

I nursed my pipe as one clings to a welcome companion, looking forward unhappily to the time when it should go out; for I knew that I dared not relight it.

When finally it did go out, I crept into the bathroom to consult my watch. I was tempted to light a cigarette there, but the glow from a cigarette is altogether more conspicuous than that from a pipe.

It was five minutes to twelve.

I extinguished the light in the bathroom, closed the door and groped my way in darkness to the window overlooking the orchard. At any moment now I expected to see Bazarada on the gravel path below me. I craned out, and as I did so, came a chill even more icy than that which had followed the phantom harping in the dining-room.

"Buzzy!" I heard, in a hysterical shriek. "Maurice!—Buzzy! For God's sake—*hurry!*"

It was Laroo.

Her room was on the same floor but right at the end of the long corridor. All else forgotten, I dashed to the door, barking my shins badly on the end of the bed, threw the door open and rushed out. I had no idea of the position of the switches. Therefore I turned on my torch, and ran headlong for the end of the passage.

A door burst open . . . The ray

of light showed me a distracted Laroo.

Wearing pyjamas, her dark hair confined in a lace cap, her eyes wide with horror, she burst out into the corridor, and seeing me, staggered forward and threw her arms about my neck.

"Maurice!" she whispered, "Maurice!" She was trembling. "Someone—something crept past the window! I was wide awake! I was not dreaming!"

Mrs. Kemp, normally a red-faced, healthy person, now appeared, dragging a dressing-gown over her night attire. She was pale and at least as frightened as Laroo.

"True, sir!" she whispered. "Miss Laroo's cry wakened me, but I saw it, too!"

"*What* did you see?"

There came sounds of scurrying footsteps. First on the scene was Malcolm, wearing a striking red dressing-gown. Lights sprang up.

Then came Kemp; close behind him, Aylmer.

Clinging to me:

"Where's Buzzy?" Laroo whispered.

"I don't know, dear—possibly fast asleep."

"What's the matter?"

Malcolm Brissard dashed up, pale and grim, his eyes fixed upon Laroo.

"Something on the balcony outside our window, sir," Mrs. Kemp replied. Her voice still held a note of terror. "It was crouching and walking very softly! . . . I couldn't help thinking, sir—perhaps it's because of the things that have happened—but I couldn't help thinking it looked . . . like a very old man, walking with a stoop!"

"I am afraid you good people are imagining things," Aylmer interrupted. "You have all heard the queer music, and the rest, I feel—"

"What's going on here?" came Bazarada's cool voice.

Laroo turned—as he came out of the door of his room, wearing a dressing gown even more brilliant than our host's.

"Buzzy!" Laroo cried, and ran to him. "How could you sleep through it?"

A formal search was made, but all windows proving to be fastened, the search was abandoned.

"Mrs. Kemp," said Laroo. "I know a wonderful new kind of Patience. Will you play it with me—because I can never sleep a wink to-night?"

As I headed for my room the disturbance having subsided:

"Bad luck!" said Bazarada, in a low voice. "Short of opening several doors—which I didn't want to do—my route lay along that ledge below Laroo's bedroom. Unfortunately she was awake and spotted me! We shall have to give it up for to-night. Clumsy work. If Laroo ever found

out she would make a point of never forgetting it . . .!"

I went back to my room. I thought about Laroo; and I knew that in one matter I agreed with her—sleep was out of the question.

Roaming restlessly up and down, I smoked three cigarettes in quick succession. Whisky and soda had been left on a table by order of the hospitable Malcolm, and I served myself a sparing drink. For a time, dimly, I could hear voices; then they ceased. Apparently, the occupants of Laley Old Place had returned to their beds.

Switching off the lights, I tumbled in. Actually, I was dead tired. My last thought, as I dozed off, was that the wind was increasing in strength—the West wind . . .

Music crept into my dreams. I saw a bard, white bearded, in flowing robes, bending over his harp. As his long, bony fingers touched the strings, I heard a queer pleading melody—a thing like a breeze through rushes—a strain which in its seeming lack of form yet was wildly beautiful; which Debussy might have heard and captured.

Daylight was just breaking when I awoke—to find Buzzy seated on the side of my bed!

"Speak softly, Maurice!"

Momentarily I thought that the Minstrel was playing again—but realized, as I became fully awake, that what I had heard was a choir of birds in the trees below my window.

"What's happened, Buzzy?"

"Since you fell asleep, two things of some interest have happened. The first: the Laley Minstrel demonstrated again!"

"Then I wasn't dreaming!"

"Not in that respect, at any rate. I rather thought it would happen. But after the uproar which my bad work had produced, I was afraid we might be watched—"

"Watched! By whom? By the ghost?"

Bazarada's lip twitched, as I could see in the growing light.

"Yes—by the ghost. Although I wanted a witness of what I expected to find, I decided to work alone—for the time being. The room in which Malcolm sleeps is called the Green Room, as you know. It was there, at a few minutes before three o'clock, that the Minstrel played."

"Malcolm has heard it in that room twice before!"

"Yes. The room is at the south-west corner of the house, so that nobody but Malcolm (and myself) seems to have heard it."

"I heard it—but thought I was dreaming."

"Your room backs on to the bend in the long corridor. The Green Room is at the end."

"Where were you when it happened?"

"Outside Malcolm's door!"

"How did you come to be there? Have you been prowling around the house the whole night?"

"Yes—inside and out!"

"Were you outside the Green Room waiting for this thing?"

"No. I was on the balcony of the Armoury—"

"On the balcony of the Armoury!"

"Exactly. Then I hurried to Malcolm's door!"

I sat up in bed staring at him.

"But if you were on the balcony along here, how on earth did you get to the Green Room?"

"Through *your* room, Maurice. Your window was open."

"And you didn't disturb me!"

"I rarely make the same mistake twice."

Swinging out of bed, I picked up my dressing-gown. This was a bewildering thing to which to awaken.

"What on earth were you doing on the balcony?"

Bazarada took a cigarette from the box beside the bed.

"Not so loud. My inquiry, Maurice, was intended to establish the link between the Minstrel and the West wind. My memories of the Singing Reed helped me. You may remember that just before we heard the sounds in the dining-room last night, Kemp went up to the Armoury and closed the window?"

"You may be right; I forget."

"Anyway, he did. I wanted to make sure that it was still closed. But when I climbed up to the balcony—it was open again!"

The significance of this escaped me. Bazarada lighted his cigarette.

"What about it?" I said.

"Most important," Bazarada replied. "I made some other inquiries and then returned to the balcony. At a few minutes before three, the figure of a man—whom I am not prepared to identify as the room was in darkness—entered the Armoury . . . and closed the window!"

"He didn't see you?"

"No. I climbed along here, went out of your door, and ran to the door of the Green Room. The Minstrel was playing! I heard Malcolm jump out of bed; heard him cry out. He started sounding the panels. He cursed quite a lot. The weird music died away. Evidently, Malcolm (who doesn't lack nerve) decided not to disturb the household again."

He ceased speaking and watched me in his disconcerting way.

"But what does all this mean, Buzzy?"

"It means several things. It's a case of rudimentary misdirection: something like forcing a card. The victim thinks he is exerting his own free will; but the penalty in this performance is death! You have acted as my alibi often enough; and another thing it means is that I am here

to act in the same capacity. It means that Malcolm will transfer to the King's Room. And it means that we are going to get really busy if a ghastly crime is to be prevented!"

The following day there were fair spells, but on the whole the weather was poor. Malcolm Brissard's property was extensive and interesting. Some five miles away there was a good golf course; on the estate plenty of rough shooting. Laroo tried hard to pretend to be interested in everything to which Malcolm drew her attention. But many times I caught her watching Bazarada pathetically.

"Maurice," she said, "this is a bogey house! Malcolm is nice. But Buzzy is doing card tricks, isn't he?"

"Card tricks?"

"He's a pig. He's got something up his sleeve. And I am simply terrified. I dare not think of tonight!"

Aylmer Brissard also had done his best to keep us cheery, but in his unofficial capacity as steward of the estate, he clearly had his hands full. There were a hundred and one things to be done, and loose ends galore to be gathered up.

We saw little of him during the afternoon, but looking very tired, he joined us just before dinner.

"The upkeep, plus the death duties," he said, lighting a cigarette, "would have crippled Malcolm, if it hadn't been for the solid cash inherited. I mean, the property alone would have sent him straight into the bankruptcy court."

Heavy clouds began massing again, as on the previous night, and Malcolm more or less monopolizing Laroo and Bazarada making himself invisible, I was not sorry when the time came to dress for dinner.

Kemp had confided to me earlier in the evening that the four inside servants who, with his wife and himself, made up the house staff, had given in their notices. The King's Room had been prepared for Malcolm Brissard.

Dinner was just a long waiting for a ghostly manifestation. The tension was vibrant. We were constantly glancing into the shadows of the great room. There were moments of disconcerting silence—during which we all listened. When, towards the close of the ordeal, Bazarada broke one of those silences, everybody started.

"It's bad luck," he said; "but I shall have to postpone further inquiries."

"What do you mean?" Aylmer asked.

"I must be in London tomorrow afternoon."

There was an awkward pause, then:

"Which means," said Malcolm, "that I'm to be left alone with the Laley Minstrel from to-night onwards? Well—I have nothing to say to that. But I had hoped *you* could solve the mystery."

"So far," Bazarada replied, "I have failed."

"I'm sorry," said Aylmer. "Malcolm and I will miss you all. We have been very happy to have you here."

"They're nice enough," Laroo whispered aside to me, later, "but if I live through the night, the big moment of my life will be the moment I leave."

Bazarada's announcement — presumably dictated by the contents of mail received during the afternoon — seemed to have cast a cloud over the party which was in no way connected with the ghostly menace.

Mrs. Kemp again shared Laroo's room.

Everyone else having turned in, Bazarada and I accompanied Malcolm to the King's Room. This was a large finely panelled apartment containing an enormous canopied four-poster bed. Bazarada inspected the apartment closely.

"Note this large oak wardrobe, Maurice," he remarked and fixed his strange, penetrating stare upon me. "It stands, you see, just left of the door. Probably dates back to the Minstrel's days."

"Even if there's no harping," said our host, smiling wryly, "I don't expect to get much sleep here to-night."

Then Buzzy made an astonishing remark.

"You won't. You're not staying here . . . *alone.*"

"What! Why not?"

"Because I anticipate that something far more dangerous than the Laley Minstrel will be appearing here to-night—"

He had been speaking in low tones. Now, he raised his voice.

"By all means, Malcolm! Come along now. I happen to have in my bag a copy of Maurice's latest novel. If this doesn't send you to sleep, nothing will."

The outcome of this strange conversation was that the three of us found ourselves in Bazarada's room. Malcolm and I sat on the bed. Buzzy walked up and down.

"There is no doubt," he said, "that the object of the Minstrel was to get you out of the Green Room and into the King's Room."

"Why into the King's Room?"

"I don't know. It is suitable in some way for what has to be done."

"And what, do you imagine, has to be done?"

"I should prefer to wait and see. It appears fairly clear that Maurice and I are here as sure evidence. By announcing my departure in the morning, I hoped to precipitate the crisis."

"Buzzy!" — Malcolm watched him pathetically — "you speak as though you think there's something at the back of all this."

"I know it!" Buzzy replied grimly; "and I think Maurice and I are intended to witness the dénouement. Now, to our dispositions." He faced us. "Go back to the King's Room, Malcolm. Remember to leave the big wardrobe open. Take this book with you. Make a great point of locking the door—but hold it clear of the latch as you do so. It will then remain ajar. Get into bed, read for ten minutes, then turn the light out."

Malcolm stared silently.

"Toss about, as if restless, and then slip quietly out and creep around behind the bed. Take up a position where you can reach the light switch of the bedside lamp and resign yourself to what may be a long vigil. I shall come in soon afterwards. But give no sign. Do nothing—*whatever happens*—until I call out 'lights' . . . Then, switch the lamp on."

"God knows what all this means," said Malcolm, "but I trust to you, Buzzy."

He went out.

"Now," said Bazarada, "along to your room, Maurice! Carefully fasten the windows and draw the curtains. Take off your shoes. Slip the Colt in your pocket. Switch off lamps. Come out and quietly lock the door. Bring the key. It is just a quarter of midnight. In ten minutes be at the King's Room. If in darkness, creep into the oak wardrobe. Leave room door only just ajar as you will find it. For heaven's sake don't fall asleep. Say nothing and do nothing, until you hear: *'lights'!"*

"What do I do then?"

"Jump out and have your gun ready!"

This sinister programme I carried through without a hitch. The door of the King's Room was the fraction of an inch open. I pushed gently. The room was in darkness. The position of the wardrobe I could not mistake. Bazarada had pointedly drawn attention to it. It was open and I slipped in. There were some garments hanging there, and I sat down in a corner of the ancient oak cabinet without making much noise.

Silence.

I peered out intently. Draperies covered the windows, so that the place was extraordinarily dark. But there was one chink which the moonlight had discovered. It took me a long time to discern even the larger objects. Bazarada, I knew, could see in the dark; furthermore, he could move silently as a cat. Was he in the room? If so—where?

Knowing not what to expect—what dread and fatal spectre—there was no chance of my falling asleep. "Something far more dangerous than the Laley Min-

strel." Those were Buzzy's words. I was unlikely to forget them.

As the minutes wore on, I began to make out some of the broader outlines. I could see the bed . . . and it seemed to me that someone lay there!

Had there been a misunderstanding—an accident? Had Malcolm met some awful end before I had arrived at my post? Was he lying there, dead?

These, and similar unpleasant theories, obsessed me. A clock in the distant hall chimed the quarter. I had failed to note midnight. As the minutes wore on, I could see well enough in the darkness to be sure, now, that the bed was occupied.

What did this mean? I heard, or imagined I could hear, in that fateful stillness, a sound of regular breathing.

I began to distrust my nerves. Half-past twelve sounded . . . the three-quarters. I was becoming cramped. I moved slowly, carefully—and as I did so, a new sound checked my movements.

Faint enough it was, but unmistakable. Somewhere a door was being softly opened!

I crouched, looking out.

Watching — watching — my heart beating a tattoo—I seemed to discern a new and deeper blackness beyond the great bed. I seemed to sense, rather than to hear, a soft *approach*.

Something — a new personality, an unfamiliar element—was in the room!

A board creaked, ever so faintly.

There was an interval, an interval of seconds only: then came a hoarse cry—followed by a sound of wild animals in combat! The bed rocked and rattled, and:

"Lights!" came a cry from Bazarada.

Lights sprang up so suddenly that my eyes were dazzled. I struggled to my feet, automatic in hand, leapt out of the wardrobe.

Almost at the same moment I heard Malcolm's voice:

"Aylmer!" then, on a note that resembled a groan, again, *"Aylmer!"*

Bazarada lay half across a man who sprawled on the bed, head twisted sideways in a stranglehold . . . It was Aylmer Brissard!

"Stick your gun in his ribs, Maurice!" said Buzzy.

There was an interval never to be forgotten. The captive, released, sat up and looked about him. His face was deathly white—and his glittering eyes appalled me—Bazarada, who wore pyjamas, took up a queer object from the coverlet . . . and now I saw blood trickling down his chin.

"Sandbag!" he remarked. "I waited a decimal point too long!"

Malcolm Brissard, coming out from behind the bed, stared at

his cousin incredulously—haggardly.

"Aylmer," he whispered.

"In the event of your death, Malcolm," said Buzzy, "the entire property goes to Aylmer. He was named, and you were left out, in the will which was destroyed just before your uncle's death."

"I know Aylmer succeeds if I die without issue," Malcolm replied unsteadily. "I didn't know —I had supplanted him."

"I found out from the lawyers. Look! That's why he wanted you in the King's Room!"

Bazarada pointed and we all stared.

A door hidden in the panelling stood wide open!

"What's back there in that passage, Aylmer Brissard?" Buzzy asked. "Make a clean breast of it. Malcolm's supreme judge here."

Aylmer moistened his lips.

"One end of the passage leads to the Armoury," he replied in a dry voice. "I found the way in —years ago."

"And the other end?"

Aylmer Brissard glanced furtively from face to face.

"There's the mouth of a shaft at the other end, just inside a low doorway. Some two hundred feet below there's a well. Listen Bazarada"—he turned his glittering eyes away from Malcolm—"I suppose, by common judgment I'm just a low criminal. But while my cousin was running wild in Africa, I worked, I worked like hell, in the business. Burton Brissard was a swine to work for. He had the soul of a sadist. But he had to leave his money to someone, and as he hated—Malcolm—he left it to me."

Aylmer Brissard spoke calmly, now—and I found this coolness appalling as his glittering eyes.

"God knows I deserved it. What change he planned when he destroyed his will nobody will ever know. But although I never had personal cause to dislike Malcolm, I didn't mean to see those years of drudgery wasted. It was a perfect scheme. How did you find out, Bazarada?"

Malcolm sat down on the side of the disordered bed and dropped his head into his hands.

"I once heard in a Malay forest," Buzzy replied, "a Singing Reed. It's a big bamboo with holes of varying sizes bored through the stem. The wind makes music on the Singing Reed very like that we have heard. What did you use? An Aeolian harp?"

The conversational tone of Bazarada, the cool voice of Aylmer Brissard, suddenly seemed to me more horrible than anything that had gone before.

"Yes—I made it myself. The legend of the Laley Minstrel gave me the idea. When I was wiring the house, I installed the harp

It has ten catgut strings, and when the wind reaches it, the effect it remarkable. It hangs between the panelling and the wall just over the inglenook in the dining-room. There's an opening above which communicates with the Green Room. So that the harp can be heard there, also."

Aylmer Brissard was beginning to speak animatedly; his peculiar eyes, which I did not seem to have noted before, sparkled with the enthusiasm of a specialist discussing his subject. I glanced at the bowed figure of Malcolm. But he did not stir. I wanted to say to him: "Don't misunderstand. It isn't villainy; it's disease. He deserves your sympathy. Long years of hated labor have broken down a fine brain."

Aylmer Brissard was a brilliant madman! At last, I understood Bazarada's conversational tone.

"You opened the big, slatted ventilator," said Buzzy, "when the wind was westerly, if you wanted the harp to play?"

"How did you find the ventilator?" Aylmer asked.

"I was looking for one. You have it geared up in some way to the window of the Armoury, so that when the window is closed the ventilator is opened, and vice versa. Of course, Malcolm"—he turned to the stricken man seated on the bed—"when your body was found in the well, there would have been ample evidence to show that you had heard the Minstrel again, found the door in the panelling—and accidentally fallen down the shaft—"

"Exactly!" shrieked Aylmer Brissard. "Could any plan have been more perfect!"

"Hold him!"

Bazarada sprang up a second too late.

His words were addressed to me. But Aylmer Brissard swept me aside. He had the strength of a tiger. A peal of mocking laughter came as the demented man darted through the door in the panelling.

"Goodbye, Malcolm!" I heard, dimly.

The splash, when his body reached the water, two hundred feet below, stole up the shaft in echoing whispers . . .

Laley Old Place today is empty. It is one of those uninhabitable haunted houses for which the Peak district is famous.

training for a new malaya

by . . . H. S. Singh

The story of a unique police college in Malaya, watched with interest by Malaya's leaders and by her neighbors.

THE Police College at Kuala Kubu Bharu, in Selangor, founded in 1953, will obviously increase in importance as more and more non-European officers move into the higher ranks of the Federation Police as a result of Malayanisation. In time, the training received there will equal—perhaps *more* than equal, in terms of the particular problems these officials must eventually face—the additional training received by police officers from the Federation who are sent, each year, to the famous British police training establishments at Wrighton-on-Dunsmore and Hendon.

The Malayan and foreign students, Nepalese, Burmese, Thai, and others, attend courses lasting from 14 days to 12 weeks and dealing with such diverse subjects as law and Malay, criminal investigation and court procedure, promotion and problems relating to promotion, and the responsibilities of advanced duties and administration. As Assistant Commissioner of Police L. G. Valpy said in a recent interview—"The college has three main aims—to increase the student's professional knowl-

Visitors to this unique training centre for Tomorrow's police officials in the Malayan Federation have included the Prime Minister, Tenku Abdul Rahman, Richard Casey, Australian Minister for External Affairs, the Commandant of the Vietnamese Garde Civile, and others throughout Asia.

edge, broaden his outlook and develop his powers of leadership." Only men marked for promotion go to the College. Already experts at their own level, they need, as Commissioner Valpy points out, "that little extra something that a man destined for senior rank is going to need. Often the things we want to get over to our classes are intangible."

The method used is the workshop rather than lecture approach.

An example of this was the classroom where two inspectors were discussing promotion. One, taking the part of a Chief Police Officer, was attempting to explain to the other—without hurting his feelings—*why* he had missed being promoted. As the two men talked, members of the class were noting down the weak points in their arguments. When it was all over, the deputy commandant of the college pointed out where the interview had been badly handled, advised how faults should be corrected, and led the subsequent group discussion. As he pointed out later, this was one of the things they tried to instil at the College. Sooner or later in his career every senior police officer would have to explain to a subordinate *why* promotion may have been denied.

In a society such as that in which these men work, with family and community loyalties often clashing with the Federation concept, this question of promotion can and often does present special problems. There may be many reasons, of course, for the decision not to promote the officer. He may be a perfectly good policeman, and *still* unable to assume the responsibilities of higher rank. But, if an interview like this is handled ineptly (*the hundred and one imitators of Brother Spillane will here nod understandingly*) it can end in an extremely unpleasant situation. The force may not only lose a valued officer. Passed over, he may feel, for entirely personal reasons, the officer may begin to take a warmer interest in the ever-present possibilities of additional income. . . .

The instructors—the directing staff, rather—are chosen for their experience and ability to communicate the finer points of policemanship to their classes. Most of them have spent their lives in Malaya. Commissioner Valpy, due to retire this year, has been in the Federation Police for the past thirty years—thirty fantastic years during which life in Malaya has changed extraordinarily. . . .

There are several methods of instruction. There are talks by visiting lecturers—somebody on say "the Press and the Police," somebody from the Customs Department on the work of that Department—and there are lectures by the resident instructors, followed by discussions.

Group discussions by students are an important part of the cur-

riculum. There are demonstrations of practical police problems by the directing staff, lectures by students on some of *their* special subjects, field exercises and visits to other Government departments, courts, and police offices. At the end of the course students are required to write a thesis of up to two thousand words.

Nearly two thousand gazetted officers and inspectors, and subordinate officers, have taken courses in the college which stands on a hill at the edge of the jungle. Nearly a hundred foreigners have taken courses there so far, including officers from Nepal, Sarawak, Burma, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. The Government of Sarawak has donated a valuable library to the College as a gesture of appreciation for the training its officers have received there. Gradually—slowly—the Police College at Kuala Kubu Bharu becomes more and more important in an Asia and in a Malaya turning to new ways. . . .

JUVENILE DELINQUENTS A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

IN MAY, 1833, a boy of nine was convicted at the Old Bailey of "breaking and entering" a dwelling house and of stealing two pennyworth from a cupboard. Translate this into modern terms—say he stole a loaf of bread . . .

Mr. Justice Bosanquet passed a sentence of death. He had no choice. This was the law at a time when, not too many years earlier, a Chief Justice of England, opposing a proposal to abolish the death sentence for stealing five shillings worth of goods from a shop, had protested angrily:

"Your Lordships will pause before you assent to a measure pregnant with danger to the security of property. . . . My Lords! If we suffer this Bill to pass, we shall not know where we stand; whether we stand upon our heads or upon our feet!"

For several years after the passage of the Reformatory School Act of 1854, a large sized prison was maintained, near Westminster Abbey, for juvenile delinquents convicted in London. An imposing fortress-like structure, with massive entrance gates weighing three tons, frowning walls, barred windows and warders, the regime was similar to that of other prisons. Even boys of nine were set to unravel one pound of tarred rope a day. Henry Mayhew commented, in his CRIMINAL PRISONS OF LONDON, on the youth of the prisoners—"some were so young that they seemed to need a nurse, rather than a gaoler, to watch over them . . ." The magistrates thought nothing of sentencing a child of ten to a month at hard labor for committing some act of petty pilfering, breaking a window, or playing pitch-and-toss in the streets.

the lost special

by...Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

THE confession of Herbert de Lernac, now lying under sentence of death at Marseilles, has thrown a light upon one of the most inexplicable crimes of the century —an incident which is, I believe, absolutely unprecedented in the criminal annals of any country. Although there is a reluctance to discuss the matter in official circles, and little information has been given to the Press, there are still indications that the statement of this arch-criminal is corroborated by the facts, and that we have at last found a solution for a most astounding business. As the matter is eight years old, and as its importance was somewhat obscured by a political crisis which was engaging the public attention at the time, it may be as well to state the facts as far as we have been able to ascertain them. They are collated from the Liverpool papers of that date, from the proceedings at the inquest upon John Slater, the engine-driver, and from the records of the London and West Coast Railway Company, which have been courteously put at my dis-

Too many would lose their reputations — and perhaps liberty — if he reached Paris. He must be stopped.

While Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) is of course better known for his stories about Sherlock Holmes, the first scientific worker in crime detection, Doyle was also the author of several novels, THE LOST WORLD, MICAH CLARKE, *etc., and a historian of note. At one time he turned detective himself, and championed the cause of two wrongly convicted men.*

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posal. Briefly, they are as follows:

On the 3rd of June, 1890, a gentleman, who gave his name as Monsieur Louis Caratal, desired an interview with Mr. James Bland, the superintendent of the London and West Coast Central Station in Liverpool. He was a small man, middle-aged and dark, with a stoop which was so marked that it suggested some deformity of the spine. He was accompanied by a friend, a man of imposing physique, whose deferential manner and constant attention showed that his position was one of dependence. This friend or companion, whose name did not transpire, was certainly a foreigner, and probably from his swarthy complexion, either a Spaniard or a South American. One peculiarity was observed in him. He carried in his left hand a small black, leather dispatch-box, and it was noticed by a sharp-eyed clerk in the Central office that this box was fastened to his wrist by a strap. No importance was attached to the fact at the time, but subsequent events endowed it with some significance. Monsieur Caratal was shown up to Mr. Bland's office, while his companion remained outside.

Monsieur Caratal's business was quickly dispatched. He had arrived that afternoon from Central America. Affairs of the utmost importance demanded that he should be in Paris without the loss of an unnecessary hour. He had missed the London express. A special must be provided. Money was of no importance. Time was everything. If the company would speed him on his way, they might make their own terms.

Mr. Bland struck the electric bell, summoned Mr. Potter Hood, the traffic manager, and had the matter arranged in five minutes. The train would start in three-quarters of an hour. It would take that time to insure that the line should be clear. The powerful engine called Rochdale (No. 247 on the company's register) was attached to two carriages, with a guard's van behind. The first carriage was solely for the purpose of decreasing the inconvenience arising from the oscillation. The second was divided, as usual, into four compartments, a first-class, a first-class smoking, a second-class, and a second-class smoking. The first compartment, which was nearest to the engine, was the one allotted to the travellers. The other three were empty. The guard of the special train was James McPherson, who had been some years in the service of the company. The stoker, William Smith, was a new hand.

Monsieur Caratal, upon leaving the superintendent's office, rejoined his companion, and both of them manifested extreme impatience to be off. Having paid

the money asked, which amounted to fifty pounds five shillings, at the usual special rate of five shillings a mile, they demanded to be shown the carriage, and at once took their seats in it, although they were assured that the better part of an hour must elapse before the line could be cleared.

In the meantime a singular coincidence had occurred in the office which Monsieur Caratal had just quitted.

A request for a special is not a very uncommon circumstance in a rich commercial centre, but that two should be required upon the same afternoon was most unusual. It so happened, however, that Mr. Bland had hardly dismissed the first traveller before a second entered with a similar request. This was a Mr. Horace Moore, a gentlemanly man of military appearance, who alleged that the sudden serious illness of his wife in London made it absolutely imperative that he should not lose an instant in starting upon the journey. His distress and anxiety were so evident that Mr. Bland did all that was possible to meet his wishes. A second special was out of the question, as the ordinary local service was already somewhat deranged by the first. There was the alternative, however, that Mr. Moore should share the expense of Monsieur Caratal's train, and should travel in the other empty first-class compartment, if Monsieur Caratal objected to having him in the one which he occupied. It was difficult to see any objection to such an arrangement, and yet Monsieur Caratal, upon the suggestion being made to him by Mr. Potter Hood, absolutely refused to consider it for an instant. The train was his, he said, and he would insist upon the exclusive use of it. All argument failed to overcome his ungracious objections, and finally the plan had to be abandoned. Mr. Horace Moore left the station in great distress, after learning that his only course was to take the ordinary slow train which leaves Liverpool at six o'clock. At four thirty-one exactly by the station clock the special train, containing the crippled Monsieur Caratal and his gigantic companion, steamed out of the Liverpool station. The line was at that time clear, and there should have been no stoppage before Manchester.

The trains of the London and West Coast Railway run over the lines of another company as far as this town, which should have been reached by the special rather before six o'clock. At a quarter after six considerable surprise and some consternation were caused amongst the officials at Liverpool by the receipt of a telegram from Manchester to say that it had not yet arrived. An inquiry directed to St. Helens, which is a third of the way be-

tween the two cities, elicited the following reply—

"To James Bland, Superintendent, Central L. & W. C., Liverpool.—Special passed here at 4.52, well up to time.—Dowser, St. Helens."

This telegram was received at six forty. At six fifty a second message was received from Manchester—

"No sign of special as advised by you."

And then ten minutes later a third more bewildering—

"Presume some mistake as to proposed running of special. Local train from St. Helens timed to follow it has just arrived and has seen nothing of it. Kindly wire advices.—Manchester."

The matter was assuming a most amazing aspect, although in some respects the last telegram was a relief to the authorities at Liverpool. If an accident had occurred to the special, it seemed hardly possible that the local train could have passed down the same line without observing it. And yet, what was the alternative? Where could the train be? Had it possibly been side-tracked for some reason in order to allow the slower train to go past? Such an explanation was possible if some small repair had to be effected. A telegram was dispatched to each of the stations between St. Helens and Manchester, and the superintendent and traffic manager waited in the utmost suspense at the instrument for the series of replies which would enable them to say for certain what had become of the missing train. The answers came back in the order of questions, which was the order of the stations beginning at the St. Helens end—

"Special passed here five o'clock.—Collins Green."

"Special passed here six past five.—Earlestown."

"Special passed here 5.10.—Newton."

"Special passed here 5.20.—Kenyon Junction."

"No special train has passed here.—Barton Moss."

The two officials stared at each other in amazement.

"This is unique in my thirty years of experience," said Mr. Bland.

"Absolutely unprecedented and inexplicable, sir. The special has gone wrong between Kenyon Junction and Barton Moss."

"And yet there is no siding, so far as my memory serves me, between the two stations. The special must have run off the metals."

"But how could the four-fifty parliamentary pass over the same line without observing it?"

"There's no alternative, Mr. Hood. It *must* be so. Possibly the local train may have observed something which may throw some light upon the matter. We will wire to Manchester for more information, and to Kenyon Junction with instructions that the

line be examined instantly as far as Barton Moss."

The answer from Manchester came within a few minutes.

"No news of missing special. Driver and guard of slow train positive no accident between Kenyon Junction and Barton Moss. Line quite clear, and no sign of anything unusual.—Manchester."

"That driver and guard will have to go," said Mr. Bland, grimly. "There has been a wreck and they have missed it. The special has obviously run off the metals without disturbing the line—how it could have done so passes my comprehension—but so it must be, and we shall have a wire from Kenyon or Barton Moss presently to say that they have found her at the bottom of an embankment."

But Mr. Bland's prophecy was not destined to be fulfilled. Half an hour passed, and then there arrived the following message from the station-master of Kenyon Junction—

"There are no traces of the missing special. It is quite certain that she passed here, and that she did not arrive at Barton Moss. We have detached engine from goods train, and I have myself ridden down the line, but all is clear, and there is no sign of any accident."

Mr. Bland tore his hair in his perplexity.

"This is rank lunacy, Hood!" he cried. "Does a train vanish into thin air in England in broad daylight? The thing is preposterous. An engine, a tender, two carriages, a van, five human beings—and all lost on a straight line of railway! Unless we get something positive within the next hour I'll take Inspector Collins, and go down myself."

And then at last something positive did occur. It took the shape of another telegram from Kenyon Junction.

"Regret to report that the dead body of John Slater, driver of the special train, has just been found among the gorse bushes at a point two and a quarter miles from the Junction. Had fallen from his engine, pitched down the embankment, and rolled among bushes. Injuries to his head, from the fall, appear to be cause of death. Ground has now been carefully examined, and there is no trace of the missing train."

The country was, as has already been stated, in the throes of a political crisis, and the attention of the public was further distracted by the important and sensational developments in Paris, where a huge scandal threatened to destroy the Government and to wreck the reputations of many of the leading men in France. The papers were full of these events, and the singular disappearance of the special train attracted less attention than would have been the case in more peaceful times. The grotesque nature of the event helped to detract from its importance, for

the papers were disinclined to believe the facts as reported to them. More than one of the London journals treated the matter as an ingenious hoax, until the coroner's inquest upon the unfortunate driver (an inquest which elicited nothing of importance) convinced them of the tragedy of the incident.

Mr. Bland, accompanied by Inspector Collins, the senior detective officer in the service of the company, went down to Kenyon Junction the same evening, and their research lasted throughout the following day, but was attended with purely negative results. Not only was no trace found of the missing train, but no conjecture could be put forward which could possibly explain the facts. At the same time, Inspector Collins's official report (which lies before me as I write) served to show that the possibilities were more numerous than might have been expected.

"In the stretch of railway between these two points," said he, "the country is dotted with ironworks and collieries. Of these, some are being worked and some have been abandoned. There are no fewer than twelve which have small gauge lines which run trolly-cars down to the main line. These can, of course, be disregarded. Besides these, however, there are seven which have, or have had, proper lines running down and connecting with points to the main line, so as to convey their produce from the mouth of the mine to the great centers of distribution. In every case these lines are only a few miles in length. Out of the seven, four belong to collieries which are worked out, or at least to shafts which are no longer used. These are the Redgauntlet, Hero, Slough of Despond, and Heartsease mines, the latter having ten years ago been one of the principal mines in Lancashire. These four side lines may be eliminated from our inquiry, for, to prevent possible accidents, the rails nearest to the main line have been taken up, and there is no longer any connection. There remain three other side lines leading—

(*a*) To the Carnstock Iron Works;
(*b*) To the Big Ben Colliery;
(*c*) To the Perseverance Colliery.

"Of these the Big Ben line is not more than a quarter of a mile long, and ends at a dead wall of coal waiting removal from the mouth of the mine. Nothing had been seen or heard there of any special. The Carnstock Iron Works line was blocked all day upon the 3rd of June by sixteen truckloads of hematite. It is a single line, and nothing could have passed. As to the Perseverance line, it is a large double line, which does a considerable traffic, for the output of the mine is very large. On the

3rd of June this traffic proceeded as usual; hundreds of men including a gang of railway platelayers, were working along the two miles and a quarter which constitute the total length of the line, and it is inconceivable that an unexpected train could have come down there without attracting universal attention. It may be remarked in conclusion that this branch line is nearer to St. Helens than the point at which the engine-driver was discovered, so that we have every reason to believe that the train was past that point before misfortune overtook her.

"As to John Slater, there is no clue to be gathered from his appearance or injuries. We can only say that, so far as we can see, he met his end by falling off his engine, though why he fell, or what became of the engine after his fall, is a question upon which I do not feel qualified to offer an opinion." In conclusion, the inspector offered his resignation to the Board, being much nettled by an accusation of incompetence in the London papers.

A month elapsed, during which both the police and the company prosecuted their inquiries without the slightest success. A reward was offered and a pardon promised in case of crime, but they were both unclaimed. Every day the public opened their papers with the conviction that so grotesque a mystery would at last be solved, but week after week passed by, and a solution remained as far off as ever. In broad daylight, upon a June afternoon in the most thickly inhabited portion of England, a train with its occupants had disappeared as completely as if some master of subtle chemistry had volatilized it into gas. Indeed, among the various conjectures which were put forward in the public press, there were some which seriously asserted that supernatural, or, at least, preternatural, agencies had been at work, and that the deformed Monsieur Caratal was probably a person who was better known under a less polite name. Others fixed upon his swarthy companion as being the author of the mischief, but what it was exactly which he had done could never be clearly formulated in words.

Amongst the many suggestions put forward by various newspapers or private individuals, there were one or two which were feasible enough to attract the attention of the public. One which appeared in *The Times,* over the signature of an amateur reasoner of some celebrity at that date, attempted to deal with the matter in a critical and semi-scientific manner. An extract must suffice, although the curious can see the whole letter in the issue of the 3rd of July.

"It is one of the elementary principles of practical reasoning," he remarked, "that when the impossible has been eliminated the residuum, *however improbable,*

must contain the truth. It is certain that the train left Kenyon Junction. It is certain that it did not reach Barton Moss. It is in the highest degree unlikely, but still possible, that it may have taken one of the seven available side lines. It is obviously impossible for a train to run where there are no rails, and, therefore, we may reduce our improbables to the three open lines, namely the Carnstock Iron Works, the Big Ben, and the Perseverance. Is there a secret society of colliers, an English *Camorra,* which is capable of destroying both train and passengers? It is improbable, but it is not impossible. I confess that I am unable to suggest any other solution. I should certainly advise the company to direct all their energies towards the observation of those three lines, and of the workmen at the end of them. A careful supervision of the pawnbrokers' shops of the district might possibly bring some suggestive facts to light."

The suggestion coming from a recognized authority upon such matters created considerable interest, and a fierce opposition from those who considered such a statement to be a preposterous libel upon an honest and deserving set of men. The only answer to this criticism was a challenge to the objectors to lay any more feasible explanations before the public. In reply to this two others were forthcoming (*Times,* July 7th and 9th). The first suggested that the train might have run off the metals and be lying submerged in the Lancashire and Staffordshire Canal, which runs parallel to the railway for some hundreds of yards. This suggestion was thrown out of court by the published depth of the canal, which was entirely insufficient to conceal so large an object. The second correspondent wrote calling attention to the bag which appeared to be the sole luggage which the travellers had brought with them, and suggesting that some novel explosive of immense and pulverizing power might have been concealed in it. The obvious absurdity, however, of supposing that the whole train might be blown to dust while the metals remained uninjured reduced any such explanation to a farce. The investigation had drifted into this hopeless position when a new and most unexpected incident occurred.

This was nothing less than the receipt by Mrs. McPherson of a letter from her husband, James McPherson, who had been the guard of the missing train. The letter, which was dated July 5th, 1890, was posted from New York and came to hand upon July 14th. Some doubts were expressed as to its genuine character, but Mrs. McPherson was positive as to the writing, and the fact that it contained a remittance of a hundred dollars in five-dollar notes was enough in itself to discount the

idea of a hoax. No address was given in the letter, which ran in this way:

"My dear Wife,—

"I have been thinking a great deal, and I find it very hard to give you up. The same with Lizzie. I try to fight against it, but it will always come back to me. I send you some money which will change into twenty English pounds. This should be enough to bring both Lizzie and you across the Atlantic, and you will find the Hamburg boats which stop at Southampton very good boats, and cheaper than Liverpool. If you could come here and stop at the Johnston House I would try and send you word how to meet, but things are very difficult with me at present, and I am not very happy, finding it hard to give you both up. So no more at present, from your loving husband,

JAMES MCPHERSON."

For a time it was confidently anticipated that this letter would lead to the clearing up of the whole matter, the more so as it was ascertained that a passenger who bore a close resemblance to the missing guard had traveled from Southampton under the name of Summers in the Hamburg and New York liner *Vistula,* which started upon the 7th of June. Mrs. McPherson and her sister Lizzie Dolton went across to New York as directed and stayed for three weeks at the Johnston House, without hearing anything from the missing man. It is probable that some injudicious comments in the Press may have warned him that the police were using them as a bait. However, this may be, it is certain that he neither wrote nor came, and the women were eventually compelled to return to Liverpool.

And so the matter stood, and has continued to stand up to the present year of 1898. Incredible as it may seem, nothing has transpired during these eight years which has shed the least light upon the extraordinary disappearance of the special train which contained Monsieur Caratal and his companion. Careful inquiries into the antecedents of the two travellers have only established the fact that Monsieur Caratal was well known as a financier and political agent in Central America, and that during his voyage to Europe he had betrayed extraordinary anxiety to reach Paris. His companion, whose name was entered upon the passenger lists as Eduardo Gomez, was a man whose record was a violent one, and whose reputation was that of a bravo and a bully. There was evidence to show, however, that he was honestly devoted to the interests of Monsieur Caratal, and that the latter, being a man of puny physique, employed the other as a guard and protector. It may be added that no information came from Paris as to what the objects of Monsieur Caratal's hurried journey may have been.

This comprises all the facts of the case up to the publication in the Marseilles papers of the recent confession of Herbert de Lernac, now under sentence of death for the murder of a merchant named Bonvalot. This statement may be literally translated as follows:

"It is not out of mere pride or boasting that I give this information, for, if that were my object, I could tell a dozen actions of mine which are quite as splendid; but I do it in order that certain gentlemen in Paris may understand that I, who am able here to tell about the fate of Monsieur Caratal, can also tell in whose interest and at whose request the deed was done, unless the reprieve which I am awaiting comes to me very quickly. Take warning, messieurs, before it is too late! You know Herbert de Lernac, and you are aware that his deeds are as ready as his words. Hasten then, or you are lost!

"At present I shall mention no names—if you only heard the names, what would you not think! —but I shall merely tell you how cleverly I did it. I was true to my employers then, and no doubt they will be true to me now. I hope so, and until I am convinced that they have betrayed me, these names, which would convulse Europe, shall not be divulged. But on that day . . . well, I say no more!

"In a word, then, there was a famous trial in Paris, in the year 1890, in connection with a monstrous scandal in politics and finance. How monstrous that scandal was can never be known save by such confidential agents as myself. The honor and careers of many of the chief men in France were at stake. You have seen a group of ninepins standing, all so rigid, and prim, and unbending. Then there comes the ball from far away and pop, pop, pop—there are your ninepins on the floor. Well, imagine some of the greatest men in France as these ninepins and then this Monsieur Caratal was the ball which could be seen coming from far away. If he arrived, then it was pop, pop, pop for all of them. It was determined that he should not arrive.

"I do not accuse them all of being conscious of what was to happen. There were, as I have said, great financial as well as political interests at stake, and a syndicate was formed to manage the business. Some subscribed to the syndicate who hardly understood what were its objects. But others understood very well, and they can rely upon it that I have not forgotten their names. They had ample warning that Monsieur Caratal was coming long before he left South America, and they knew that the evidence which he held would certainly mean ruin to all of them. The syndicate had the command of an unlimited amount of money—absolutely unlimited, you understand. They looked round

for an agent who was capable of wielding this gigantic power. The man chosen must be inventive, resolute, adaptive—a man in a million. They chose Herbert de Lernac, and I admit that they were right.

"My duties were to choose my subordinates, to use freely the power which money gives, and to make certain that Monsieur Caratal should never arrive in Paris. With characteristic energy I set about my commission within an hour of receiving my instructions, and the steps which I took were the very best for the purpose which could possibly be devised.

"A man whom I could trust was dispatched instantly to South America to travel home with Monsieur Caratal. Had he arrived in time the ship would never have reached Liverpool; but alas! it had already started before my agent could reach it. I fitted out a small armed brig to intercept it, but again I was unfortunate. Like all great organizers I was, however, prepared for failure, and had a series of alternatives prepared, one or the other of which must succeed. You must not underrate the difficulties of my undertaking, or imagine that a mere commonplace assassination would meet the case. We must destroy not only Monsieur Caratal, but Monsieur Caratal's documents, and Monsieur Caratal's companions also, if we had reason to believe that he had communicated his secrets to them. And you must remember that they were on the alert, and keenly suspicious of any such attempt. It was a task which was in every way worthy of me, for I am always most masterful where another would be appalled.

"I was all ready for Monsieur Caratal's reception in Liverpool, and I was the more eager because I had reason to believe that he had made arrangements by which he would have a considerable guard from the moment that he arrived in London. Anything which was to be done must be done between the moment of his setting foot upon the Liverpool quay and that of his arrival at the London and West Coast terminus in London. We prepared six plans, each more elaborate than the last; which plan would be used would depend upon his own movements. Do what he would, we were ready for him. If he had stayed in Liverpool, we were ready. If he took an ordinary train, an express, or a special, all was ready. Everything had been foreseen and provided for.

"You may imagine that I could not do all this myself. What could I know of the English railway lines? But money can procure willing agents all the world over, and I soon had one of the acutest brains in England to assist me. I will mention no names, but it would be unjust to claim all the credit for myself. My English ally was worthy of such an alliance. He

knew the London and West Coast line thoroughly, and he had the command of a band of workers who were trustworthy and intelligent. The idea was his, and my own judgment was only required in the details. We bought over several officials, amongst whom the most important was James McPherson, whom we had ascertained to be the guard most likely to be employed upon a special train. Smith, the stoker, was also in our employ. John Slater, the engine-driver, had been approached, but had been found to be obstinate and dangerous, so we desisted. We had no certainty that Monsieur Caratal would take a special, but we thought it very probable, for it was of the utmost importance to him that he should reach Paris without delay. It was for this contingency, therefore, that we made special preparations—preparations which were complete down to the last detail long before his steamer had sighted the shores of England. You will be amused to learn that there was one of my agents in the pilot-boat which brought that steamer to its moorings.

"The moment that Caratal arrived in Liverpool we knew that he suspected danger and was on his guard. He had brought with him as an escort a dangerous fellow, named Gomez, a man who carried weapons, and was prepared to use them. This fellow carried Caratal's confidential papers for him, and was ready to protect either them or his master. The probability was that Caratal had taken him into his counsels, and that to remove Caratal without removing Gomez would be a mere waste of energy. It was necessary that they should be involved in a common fate, and our plans to that end were much facilitated by their request for a special train. On that special train you will understand that two out of the three servants of the company were really in our employ, at a price which would make them independent for a lifetime. I do not go so far as to say that the English are more honest than any other nation, but I have found them more expensive to buy.

"I have already spoken of my English agent—who is a man with a considerable future before him, unless some complaint of the throat carries him off before his time. He had charge of all arrangements at Liverpool, whilst I was stationed at the inn at Kenyon, where I awaited a cipher signal to act. When the special was arranged for, my agent instantly telegraphed to me and warned me how soon I should have everything ready. He himself under the name of Horace Moore applied immediately for a special also, in the hope that he would be sent down with Monsieur Caratal, which might under certain circumstances have been helpful to us. If, for example, our great *coup* had

failed, it would then have become the duty of my agent to have shot them both and destroyed their papers. Caratal was on his guard, however, and refused to admit any other traveler. My agent then left the station, returned by another entrance, entered the guard's van on the side farthest from the platform, and traveled down with McPherson the guard.

"In the meantime you will be interested to know what my movements were. Everything had been prepared for days before, and only the finishing touches were needed. The side line which we had chosen had once joined the main line, but it had been disconnected. We had only to replace a few rails to connect it once more. These rails had been laid down as far as could be done without danger of attracting attention, and now it was merely a case of completing a juncture with the line, and arranging the points as they had been before. The sleepers had never been removed, and the rails, fishplates and rivets were all ready, for we had taken them from a siding on the abandoned portion of the line. With my small but competent band of workers, we had everything ready long before the special arrived. When it did arrive, it ran off upon the small side line so easily that the jolting of the points appears to have been entirely unnoticed by the two travelers.

"Our plan had been that Smith, the stoker, should chloroform John Slater, the driver, so that he should vanish with the others. In this respect, and in this respect only, our plans miscarried—I except the criminal folly of McPherson in writing home to his wife. Our stoker did his business so clumsily that Slater in his struggles fell off the engine, and though fortune was with us so far that he broke his neck in the fall, still he remained as a blot upon that which would otherwise have been one of those complete masterpieces which are only to be contemplated in silent admiration. The criminal expert will find in John Slater the one flaw in all our admirable combinations. A man who has had as many triumphs as I can afford to be frank, and I therefore lay my finger upon John Slater, and I proclaim him to be a flaw.

"But now I have got our special train upon the small line two kilometers, or rather more than one mile, in length, which leads, or rather used to lead, to the abandoned Heartsease mine, once one of the largest coal mines in England. You will ask how it is that no one saw the train upon this unused line. I answer that along its entire length it runs through a deep cutting, and that, unless someone had been on the edge of that cutting, he could not have seen it. There *was* someone on the edge of that cutting. I was there. And now I will tell you what I saw.

"My assistant had remained at the points in order that he might superintend the switching off of the train. He had four armed men with him, so that if the train ran off the line—we thought it probable, because the points were very rusty—we might still have resources to fall back upon. Having once seen it safely on the side line, he handed over the responsibility to me. I was waiting at a point which overlooks the mouth of the mine, and I was also armed, as were my two companions. Come what might, you see, I was always ready.

"The moment that the train was fairly on the side line, Smith, the stoker, slowed-down the engine, and then, having turned it on to the fullest speed again, he and McPherson, with my English lieutenant, sprang off before it was too late. It may be that it was this slowing-down which first attracted the attention of the travelers, but the train was running at full speed again before their heads appeared at the open window. It makes me smile to think how bewildered they must have been. Picture to yourself your own feelings if, on looking out of your luxurious carriage, you suddenly perceived that the lines upon which you ran were rusted and corroded, red and yellow with disuse and decay! What a catch must have come in their breath as in a second it flashed upon them that it was not Manchester but Death which was waiting for them at the end of that sinister line. But the train was running with frantic speed, rolling and rocking over the rotten line, while the wheels made a frightful screaming sound upon the rusted surface. I was close to them, and could see their faces. Caratal was praying, I think—there was something like a rosary dangling out of his hand. The other roared like a bull who smells the blood of the slaughter-house. He saw us standing on the bank, and he beckoned to us like a madman. Then he tore at his wrist and threw his dispatch-box out of the window in our direction. Of course, his meaning was obvious. Here was the evidence, and they would promise to be silent if their lives were spared. It would have been very agreeable if we could have done so, but business is business. Besides, the train was now as much beyond our control as theirs.

"He ceased howling when the train rattled round the curve and they saw the black mouth of the mine yawning before them. We had removed the boards which had covered it, and we had cleared the square entrance. The rails had formerly run very close to the shaft for the convenience of loading the coal, and we had only to add two or three lengths of rail in order to lead to the very brink of the shaft. In fact, as the lengths would not quite fit, our line projected about three feet over the

edge. We saw the two heads at the window: Caratal below, Gomez above; but they had both been struck silent by what they saw. And yet they could not withdraw their heads. The sight seemed to have paralyzed them.

"I had wondered how the train running at a great speed would take the pit into which I had guided it, and I was much interested in watching it. One of my colleagues thought that it would actually jump it, and indeed it was not very far from doing so. Fortunately, however, it fell short, and the buffers of the engine struck the other lip of the shaft with a tremendous crash. The funnel flew off into the air. The tender, carriages, and van were all smashed up into one jumble, which, with the remains of the engine, choked for a minute or so the mouth of the pit. Then something gave way in the middle, and the whole mass of green iron, smoking coals, brass fittings, wheels, wood-work, and cushions all crumbled together and crashed down into the mine. We heard the rattle, rattle, rattle, as the debris struck against the walls, and then, quite a long time afterwards, there came a deep roar as the remains of the train struck the bottom. The boiler may have burst, for a sharp crash came after the roar, and then a dense cloud of steam and smoke swirled up out of the black depths, falling in a spray as thick as rain all round us. Then the vapor shredded off into thin wisps, which floated away in the summer sunshine, and all was quiet again in the Heartsease mine.

"And now, having carried out our plans so successfully, it only remained to leave no trace behind us. Our little band of workers at the other end had already ripped up the rails and disconnected the side line, replacing everything as it had been before. We were equally busy at the mine. The funnel and other fragments were thrown in, the shaft was planked over as it used to be, and the lines which led to it were torn up and taken away. Then, without flurry, but without delay, we all made our way out of the country, most of us to Paris, my English colleague to Manchester, and McPherson to Southampton, whence he emigrated to America. Let the English papers of that date tell how thoroughly we had done our work, and how completely we had thrown the cleverest of their detectives off our track.

"You will remember that Gomez threw his bag of papers out of the window, and I need not say that I secured that bag and brought them to my employers. It may interest my employers now, however, to learn that out of that bag I took one or two little papers as a souvenir of the occasion. I have no wish to publish these papers; but, still, it is every man for himself in this world, and what else can I do if my friends will

not come to my aid when I want them? Messieurs, you may believe that Herbert de Lernac is quite as formidable when he is against you as when he is with you, and that he is not a man to go to the guillotine until he has seen that every one of you is *en route* for New Caledonia. For your own sake, if not for mine, make haste, Monsieur de —, and General —, and Baron — (you can fill up the blanks for yourselves as you read this). I promise you that in the next edition there will be no blanks to fill.

"P.S.—As I look over my statement there is only one omission which I can see. It concerns the unfortunate man McPherson, who was foolish enough to write to his wife and to make an appointment with her in New York. It can be imagined that when interests like ours were at stake, we could not leave them to the chance of whether a man in that class of life would or would not give away his secrets to a woman. Having once broken his oath by writing to his wife we could not trust him any more. We took steps therefore to insure that he should not see his wife. I have sometimes thought that it would be a kindness to write to her and to assure her that there is no impediment to her marrying again."

NEXT MONTH—

Simon Templar has reason
to pause for one brief moment
as he considers—

THE ELEMENT OF DOUBT

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

— in THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

reluctant victim

by . . . Lawrence Treat

Rita was an exciting woman —and it was easy to forget this strange and rather mad man that she was married to.

IT WAS a full month since Vic had seen her, a month since he'd dared take this eerie road that wound through the woods and ended up in front of the big, rambling house where she lived.

The first time he'd driven here, he'd hardly known Rita Digby. He was taking her home from a party, and as he approached her turn, she warned him.

"Don't mind all the gadgets," she said. "Carl loves to install them. Warning signals and lights that flash and burglar-traps and voices that tell you what to do. He even has a jack-in-the-box for Cynthia. She walks past a certain tree and the thing jumps up and says 'Boo!' "

"Oh." The mention of the child startled Vic. He'd forgotten Rita was married and he'd been driving along in a kind of limbo, just the darkness ahead and a faint light inside the car, a subdued glow that seemed to emanate from within her.

"Oh," he said. "Sense of humor?"

She reacted sharply. "Carl, a sense of humor? Hardly."

"What do you mean then?"

Laurence Treat, distinguished mystery writer, active in the field for the past twenty years, is the author of the recent BIG SHOT *(Harper). He will be remembered for his* SING A SONG OF MURDER *in our March 1958 issue, and* THE UNITED NATIONS MURDER CASE, *in the October 1957* Saint.

"Nothing. I'm talking nonsense. Turn here, at the gate."

Vic was a recent arrival, then, in the quiet, sedate community where American Electronics, Inc., had set up its research facilities. He was in the administrative end, personnel, but he had scientific training and he mixed easily and naturally with the lab people.

At the office he was introduced to Carl Digby, the electronics wizard who was working on some kind of automatic firing device. Carl, a tall, powerful man, lived within himself and avoided his colleagues. He had a passion for fast, sport cars and he drove wildly, for long distances, at night. He claimed he did his best thinking alone, behind the wheel of a car, rocketing down a strip of dark, deserted highway.

Apart from this hobby, his whole life was science, and he had no interest in socializing with the A. E. group. He spent most of his nights and his weekends alone, either in his beloved lab or else in his workshop at home, setting up complicated electronic contraptions for the amazement of visitors. Which meant that Vic, as one of the few bachelors in the community, was thrown constantly in Rita's company.

They liked each other from the beginning, and her image came to haunt him. There were long afternoons at the lake when they lay in the sun, with their hands locked and their voices low. Vic, watching her cryptic smile, the curve of her eyebrows, the quick, harried play of her lips, was aware of some disturbance deep within her. It seemed to be a part of her character that had to do with Carl, and she closed it off.

"Don't," she'd say, if Vic tried to probe her. And she'd become remote, lost in a strange, unreachable world, until Cynthia came scampering out of the water and rushed over. "Mummy, may I go out in the boat? Mummy, may I go home with the Jeffersons?" Then Rita would look transformed, and her dark eyes would grow clear and bright and innocent.

Vic wondered about the Digby marriage, and he had the impression that Rita shrank from Carl, as if he were her evil genius. She seemed to treasure every moment with Vic, and he was glad of it.

His interest in Rita was apparently a subject of discussion, for his friends warned him. "Be careful of Carl."

"Why?"

"You must have heard about it. A couple of years ago one of his lab assistants fell in love with her. Nice young guy, everybody liked him. And then—well, officially it was called suicide and nobody could prove otherwise, but there were nasty rumors."

"Not about her."

"She does what Carl tells her to. Vic, you're playing with dynamite."

Vic, however, was not playing.

He was in love, and the prospect of breaking up a home and a marriage bothered him far more than any possible danger. Nevertheless, one evening when he was taking her home from a party, he forced the issue.

"I may not have the right to say this," he began uncertainly, "and the last thing I want is to make you unhappy. But I can't go on like this. I love you, and I think you love me, too. You have no kind of a life with Carl, I can feel he's bad for you. Leave him, Rita, so that you can be free of whatever's bothering you."

"Vic," she said tenderly. "Do I really mean so much to you?"

He nodded. "You bet you do. That's why I want you to break away."

"Vic, dear, Carl's my husband, give me time to think. I need solitude, so that I can look into my mind and not have any doubts. For a little while, please don't see me, don't even come near me."

Vic obeyed, and for the next few weeks he neither saw her nor spoke to her, and he refused to think of what she was going through. Until her phone call this afternoon, after which he could think of nothing else.

"Vic," she said, "he's going to that convention, he'll be away for a couple of days and I have to see you. It's terribly important." And Vic, catching the worry and the urgency in her voice, said, "Sure, I'll come by. Eight o'clock tonight."

Ever since, his pulses had been pounding and he'd done no work. He kept wondering why she'd taken a chance like that, called him at the office, risked being overheard. Whatever had happened, she must be desperate.

He sighted the turn to the private lane and he squeezed his car through the pair of ornamental gate posts. Immediately a green light flashed on, and as he wound along the narrow road through the woods, the voices spoke. They came from speakers hidden in the trees and they welcomed you, told you to deliver packages at the rear, to park in front of the garage. Once, Vic thought he heard shrill laughter, and he had the sense of being watched.

At the wide, cleared space in front of the garage, the floodlights came on automatically. He parked and stepped out. He was a tall, lean man, fair-complexioned, and he held his head high, as if he was proud of his tallness. His steel-rimmed glasses gave him a grave, reliable look.

He stood motionless for a moment, glancing around. It struck him that maybe a camera was trained on him, that a concealed microphone might record his words after he reached the house. He shouldn't have come here, of all places. He should have arranged to meet Rita elsewhere.

With his mind still on Rita, he

noticed the child's hoop lying just to the right of his car, near a maple tree. There was a greenish stone in the center, and he kicked idly at the hoop, so that it would be safe from his car wheels when he backed out. Then, thinking that Cynthia might have wanted the hoop left there as part of some game, he picked it up and placed it carefully next to another maple. As an afterthought, he moved the stone, too.

Smiling, vaguely pleased at his considerateness, he started towards the rock stairs that ascended to the house. At the bottom step, his legs would intercept a beam, and a voice would warn him to be careful. But he was unprepared for the words. "Watch your step, *Vic.*"

He stopped short, whirled and stared at the small, wooden box that contained the speaker. Uncertain whether he'd heard correctly, he moved back and repassed the beam.

Nothing happened. He supposed there was a time interval before the tape replayed, or else the mechanism had broken down. Or maybe the warning, once given, had erased itself.

Nevertheless the incident disturbed him, and he went warily up the steps. When something moved in the darkness of the trees, he froze. "Hello?" he said softly.

The rustling of leaves answered him, and the reflection of the floodlights caught a small, bright bit of metal. Tense, alert, he squinted at it. A branch moved and the pinpoint of silver vanished. Ominously, he recalled Rita's mention of a burglar trap. He thought of a gun rigged somewhere in the trees, and he remembered the story of her earlier lover.

Suicide? Hardly. A normal man doesn't kill himself because of an unhappy love affair. He's miserable for a while, but he survives. The facts were that Carl had committed murder, and he had ample reason to repeat the crime.

And Rita? She must have guessed, deep down, and that was the reason for the disturbance Vic so often sensed in her. He wondered what strange compulsion kept her with the man who had killed her lover. Habit, loyalty, fear? A kind of Svengali dominance?

Vic's stomach tightened up. Another dot of quicksilver gleamed, blotted itself out and reappeared a few feet away. He realized he was seeing drops of early dew, and he felt silly. Besides, how could a gun in there be aimed accurately?

At the distant drumming of a plane, Vic raised his head and gazed upwards. An invisible thing roaring through the night, plummeting in space. And perhaps in the cabin sat Carl Digby, talking, polishing his glasses, explaining to somebody how you could shoot a man electronically.

Vic shuddered and took a deep breath. But for tonight, at least, he could forget Carl. Vic walked boldly up the steps. The door of the house opened, and Rita was standing there.

She was slim and lovely under her crown of soft, dark hair. Her shoulders were squared out by the bunching of her dress, and light bathed the smooth flesh of her arms. Vic stopped in front of her and glanced down. Her dark eyes were anxious, and her lips, barely parted as if in fear of his kiss, quivered. He saw that she was wrought up, there was an expectancy about her, as if she was seething with inner excitement.

"Vic," she said, "you're white as a sheet. Is anything the matter?"

"No. I guess just seeing you, after so long—Rita!" And he leaned down and kissed her.

She responded avidly, but almost immediately she pushed him away. "You shouldn't have done that."

"After a whole month?" he said, laughing and stroking her face. "But tell me first—what happened? You said there was something important. What?"

She shook her head nervously. "Later. The important thing is that you're here."

"Sure, but I don't understand you, and maybe I never will. The way you change, suddenly and without reason—it leaves me baffled."

"Then I'll tell you. Carl suspects, and I'm afraid of what he might do to you."

"But I haven't seen you in weeks. If he'd suspected before, believe me, I'd be worried. But now, it doesn't make sense."

"You don't know Carl," she said.

"Do you?"

"Yes. He keeps things to himself, he builds up feelings until they burst. He's evil, Vic, and sometimes the evil seems to seep into me, too."

"Nonsense!" Vic said. "You've been alone too much, you ought to go out and see people again. There's nothing wrong that an evening with me won't fix up."

"I hope so," she said.

She sighed dispiritedly, and her eyes, bright and feverish, gazed at Vic as if in a trance. Then, from a wall grating across the room, Vic heard a sound. A bar seemed to drop into a slot with a dull, echoless jolt, and make metallic contact with its relay. Something hummed like a radio warming up, and a voice spoke. It was Rita's, low and urgent.

"Vic, he's going to that convention, he'll be away for a couple of days and I have to see you. It's terribly important." Vic's answer was reproduced fuzzily, but the firm reassurance came through. "Sure, I'll come by. Eight o'clock tonight." There was a short pause before Carl's voice cut in. It seemed to be suppressing its laughter.

"I'm warning you," it said. "I'm warning you. You're trapped."

There was a crackle, and the next words were blurred. The mechanism clicked, whirred, switched off. Vic looked at the clock. 8:05.

Rita backed away slowly and sank into a chair. "Did you hear?" she whispered.

Vic nodded. He suspected there was a recording device in the room, and that whatever he said would be preserved for Carl's ears. Not looking at Rita, Vic walked over to the phonograph, pulled out a record and put it on the player. He turned the volume high, and the blast almost deafened him. He spun the dial and the music came back into focus, something vaguely familiar to which he hardly listened.

He didn't hear Rita approach, but her voice was close to him. "That was awful."

"He must be half-mad," Vic said in a low tone. "But all he's trying to do is scare us."

"He's succeeding," she said. "I am scared. Vic, aren't you?"

"Sure," he said.

He took her by the hand and led her to a window. He faced it and he spoke to her image, dim and shadowy and lovely in the glass.

"At least we know how things stand," he said.

"What are you going to do?"

"Take you away with me. Tonight."

"And Cynthia? She's upstairs, asleep."

"Of course," Vic said. "I should have thought of her, particularly because there's no real hurry. Carl's on a plane hundreds of miles away, and we're going to sit down quietly and decide what to do."

"He didn't fly, he's driving. You know Carl. He'll drive all night and have some wonderful ideas about—" She stopped, and she turned and looked directly at Vic.

He kept on speaking to her image in the window. "What's the matter?" he asked. She shook her head violently and he said again, "What is it? What?"

She didn't answer. "All right," he said. "We're both thinking of the same thing, so I'll say it. He warned me, he said I was trapped. You're wondering if he didn't plant a gun somewhere, a kind of booby trap. That's what you're worried about, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I was, too, but don't you see how ridiculous it is? He wouldn't dare, the evidence against him would be open and shut."

"He'd never even think of that. He'd be so involved in what he was doing that nothing else would exist."

"Maybe he's that way in the lab, but outside, he's normal enough, he'll protect himself. Listen, Rita—he deals in science, I deal with people. Maybe I can't

out-think his gadgets, but I can out-think *him* and guess exactly what he'll do." Vic smiled, almost convinced himself by his own logic. "And I'm certain he won't try a booby-trap."

"But the other time," she said faintly.

Vic's heart gave a thump, and he waited a few moments before speaking. "Then it's true," he said. "Carl really did."

Her words were tremulous, Vic could hardly hear her. "Yes, I think so. He loves to kill people. He just loves to."

"And you stayed with him, knowing?"

"What could I do? My own husband—and how could I be sure? It's awful, isn't it? What should I have done?"

"Tell me how he did it."

"I don't know. But you're in danger, Vic. Something's going to happen. Maybe when you walk down the steps, or when you get in your car—"

"Stop it, Rita. Stop it."

"But it's true. I'm afraid to let you leave and afraid to let you stay. You could go out the back way, and then maybe somebody else, the next person who goes down the steps—it might be Cynthia, it might be me. I—" Her voice rose in terror. "Vic, look!"

She pointed, and through the window he saw the headlights of a car sweep towards the house and disappear in a bend of the long driveway. In the darkness of the woods, lights flashed and blinked to mark electronically the progress of a car.

Vic watched somberly. His pulses raced and his throat felt dry. Would Carl set a trap without realizing it was bound to convict him of murder? Or had he concocted an elaborate piece of hocus-pocus to send Vic running, scared of his life and scared ever again to see Rita?

Rita shivered. "Whoever they are, we have to stop them, we don't know what they may stumble into."

"No." Vic's voice came strong and determined. "I said I could out-think him, and I can. He's not going to give us this chance of two whole days together. He's coming back, now."

Vic walked to the front door and flung it open. He saw the floodlights switch on. The sound of a motor died out, and a car door slammed. Then there was silence.

"He'll be here in a minute or two," Vic said, "and I'm ready to face him. Can I tell him that you—" He turned and gave her an anxious look.

For answer, she put her arms around Vic and kissed him with a fierce, savage intensity. He felt her tremendous, overwrought excitement, and his senses swam in a kind of delirium. He had no idea how long they clung to each other. He was aware only of the

overwhelming force of Rita's emotion, and he told himself that she was finally his, and he had to protect her.

When they stepped apart, they were both breathless. Her eyes were enormous, and they looked up at him in wordless adoration. He smiled, and glanced out of the doorway.

He heard footsteps slapping on the gravel of the parking area and heading for the house. There was no warning voice at the bottom step, the device had either broken down or else turned itself off. The only sound was the measured tramp of shoes ascending the rock steps.

As Carl Digby came into view, Vic stiffened, holding himself rigid, with every muscle in his body tensely alert. He stared at Carl's small, even features, his sharp little nose and his bright eyes. They were level with Vic's and they glared from behind identical glasses.

Carl, however, addressed his wife. "Good evening," he said. "I see you have company."

"Yes," she answered nervously. "You know Vic, don't you?"

Carl eyed Vic contemptuously. "Weren't expecting me, were you?"

"On the contrary," Vic answered. "I was."

Carl bristled. "That's interesting," he remarked. "In your new role, as host?"

"No. I came here to talk things over with Rita, quietly and without stress, as she has the right to do."

"She has no rights," Carl said coldly. "And neither have you. Not even the right to be treated as a human being. I'm going to make you crawl and cringe, and then—"

"Then what?" Vic said.

"Do you really think you'll get out of here alive? Do you?"

"Carl!" Rita's voice was sharp, hysterical. "Don't say such things —you don't mean them."

Carl surveyed her as if he was examining a defective transistor. "Do you object?" he said. "Would you rather it be me? Because whoever walks out of this room—" His small eyes glittered. "You can choose, Rita. Which one of us do you want out of the way?"

She let out a moan and she sat down weakly. Her lips moved, but no sound emerged. She clawed at the upholstered arm of the chair and her nails made a harsh, rasping sound. Her fingers stopped abruptly when she heard the whimper from upstairs. Cynthia's voice called out, "Mummy—Mummy!"

Rita jerked to her feet as if she'd been yanked by a wire. "You woke her up," she said in a low voice. "You scared her. How could you?" Swaying a little and rubbing her forehead, she left the room.

Carl chuckled. "Women and

children—they ruffle the ordered logic of existence. If it weren't for them, you and I might be friends. Too bad, isn't it?"

"I don't see why we can't be," Vic said nervously. "Let's go down to the village, the two of us. We'll have a drink together."

"But I thought I explained. You're about to commit suicide. With a little help, of course."

Vic strained his ears. From upstairs he could hear the murmur of voices. Rita had said that Carl loved to kill people, and Vic had boasted that he could out-think Carl. His motivations, his vanity. A gadget may be perfect, but the man who presses the button isn't.

"How do you expect to kill me?" Vic asked quietly.

Carl shrugged. "Like the other time. Except that he was more docile, whereas you try to fight back."

"That's right," said Vic. "In fact, I'm going to call the police."

"Go ahead, but what will you tell them? That I threatened you? Why wouldn't I, when you sneaked in to see my wife as soon as you thought I'd gone away? Or will you say there's a trap somewhere, you don't know what it is, but you think they should look? Well, let them. There's nothing. Absolutely nothing to find."

Maybe there was and maybe there wasn't, but Vic thought of the danger to Rita, later on, if the police were called in and discovered nothing. He thought, too, of the agony Carl was putting her through.

"I'll leave now," Vic said shakily, "if you come with me."

Carl gave a little bow. "Certainly. It's rather like Russian roulette, isn't it? Are you going first, or shall I?"

"You are," said Vic, and told himself that this was Russian roulette in which one of the contestants knew which chamber was loaded and when and where the gun would fire. Nevertheless he followed Carl down the stone steps, but a careful foot or two behind. He watched Carl closely, waiting for the unexpected movement, the sudden leap, the telltale gesture. Nothing happened.

Carl paused at the bottom step. "Something I worked out in the lab," he said. "I'd like to thank you for giving me the chance to try it out."

"You *are* mad," Vic said in a low, stunned voice.

"When a man tries to take away my wife, I retaliate. Is that madness?"

Vic sucked in his lips and followed Carl across the parking area. Vic had been right so far, his thinking had been a step ahead of Carl, but Vic's very life depended on continuing to be right, in every detail. For, if Carl had a diseased brain, it was nevertheless an able one.

Vic let his eyes drop to Carl's pockets and then to his waist line. Apparently Carl had no gun, but

his scheme was clear. A shot, a few seconds to place a gun in Vic's hand and remove the firing gadget, and Carl would be off, unseen except by his wife.

"Carl," Vic said in a dry voice. "You can't get away with it, because even if your scheme worked, it would still be murder. You're here, Rita knows it and she heard you threaten me, and the police will question her and get the whole story."

Carl snorted. "You're a bigger fool than I thought. Don't you understand that when I do something, it's scientific, it's perfect? You'll be found with a gun in your hand. Suicide. And you can't escape."

Vic compressed his jaw. As far as he was concerned, it didn't matter whether Carl actually fooled the police, for he believed he would, he had absolute faith in his plan and he was determined to carry it out. In a few minutes he expected to be ready to leave; he'd drive like a madman and reach his convention on schedule. And reason didn't get through to him. Only one thing could ever shake him—an instrument that didn't work the way it was supposed to.

With a start, Vic noticed the child's hoop that he'd moved almost an hour ago. It struck him that children don't usually play with hoops and that the wooden ring might indicate a target area in which Carl expected Vic to stand, so that the bullet would find him. Vic realized that the hoop was much closer to the car than when he'd left, and that, in order to open his car door, he'd have to step into the hoop.

But had the car been moved, or had the hoop been put back into its original position?

It made a difference. If the car had been moved and the hoop was where Vic had put it, he was probably safe. But if the hoop had been put back where Vic had originally found it, then it was probably death to step inside it.

He recalled the minute or so that had elapsed between Carl's arrival and his ascent up the steps. Carl must have done something during that interval, set up his gadget and arranged the stage. But Rita had been in Vic's arms, he'd been filled with her and had heard nothing. He merely knew that time had elapsed.

He stared at the tree, but he was mixed up now. Which maple had the hoop been in front of, originally? As if in a nightmare, Vic saw that all the trees were maples and looked identical. And he saw that the gravel held stones of many colors, green ones and red ones and browns and pinks. And the stone in the center of the hoop lay in the deep shadow of the car. It was a stone with a green tinge, but was it the one he'd placed there? Pea-green, Nile-green, olive, emerald—he seemed suddenly to go blind and he stared, uncertain of what he was

seeing, unable to trust either his memory or his present vision.

He began to sweat, and the tensions of this evening piled up into an almost unbearable strain. His mind panicked, he could no longer think straight, and a kind of hysteria took possession of him. His muscles twitched and he was afraid that if he stood here talking for another second, he'd faint.

With a sudden lunge, he grabbed Carl and tried to push him at the hoop, but Carl shook him off with a vicious, twisting jolt that sent Vic staggering back. He set himself for a blow, but Carl did not attack. He loomed, big and burly and dangerous, with a half-smile on his lips and his cold, bright eyes staring fixedly.

"Don't," he said in a thin voice. "Don't try that again. Can't you see how helpless you are?"

Vic didn't answer. He realized that it was useless to fight Carl. Run, Vic told himself. Save your life, get away from here. Carl has planned everything, he even told you what he intends to do, you don't have a chance. Run.

And Rita? What about her?

"I can't out-think his gadgets," Vic had told her a little while ago, "but I can out-think *him*."

Vic's brain began to clear and his heart-beat quickened, strong and steady. He stepped past Carl and approached the car. With one hand resting on the fender, Vic studied the trees.

Which maple?

He glanced at the ground then, but the loose gravel held no tire marks. He was practically certain that he'd guessed the essence of Carl's plan. The hoop did mark the target at which a gun was set to fire. But which had been moved? The car or the hoop? Russian roulette, Vic reflected, with a twist.

His knees were rubbery as he approached the hoop and indicated it with a gesture. "Cynthia's?" he asked.

Carl nodded, but he was taut, nervous, expectant, and his former assurance was gone.

"Don't you want to give it to her?" Vic asked.

Carl shook his head, quickly.

"Then I will," Vic said.

Carl's small, glittering eyes that had been so expressionless were alive with glee. Vic said, "Carl, why did you move my car?"

"Because—" Carl stopped, unaware of the significance of his admission. "What are you talking about?" he asked in a cracked voice.

"Nothing," Vic said quietly. "Except that your scheme won't work. You lose." And he stepped squarely inside the hoop.

Carl's mouth gaped and his eyes almost popped out of his head. He screamed out, "But—but—but it *has* to work!" Then, shocked and bewildered and hardly able to believe, he lurched back and nearly bumped into a tree.

The flame was bright orange, and in the stillness of the night the report of the shot was deafening. Carl looked as if he'd been punched. The bullet penetrated him squarely between the eyes, and he toppled. Dimly, Vic saw a gun drop from a branch, as if the recoil had flung it loose.

Rita's shriek sounded from the house. Vic touched his glasses, felt the steel rims. Like Carl's. Aimed magnetically, on the principle of the firing device on which Carl had been experimenting. Set to go off when someone reached a prearranged spot, which Carl had marked with a hoop.

Vic bent down low so that his eyes were shaded and he could peer into the darkness and glimpse the box-like mechanism in the trees. It was fastened to a branch, and it would effectively prove Vic's innocence to the police. He supposed Carl had expected to remove it and then drive off. But how could he have gotten away with it, after Rita's evidence?

Vic frowned, and he heard the tap of Rita's shoes as she raced down the stone steps. Then she called out.

"Carl, haven't you gone yet? You'd better hurry, because I've called the police already, just like you told me to, and if you don't want them to find you—"

She broke off as Vic stood up. He stepped forward slowly, not speaking, for he was unable to.

ADDING INSULT TO INJURY

SOMETIME AROUND 1800, in England, a tailor had killed a soldier in a drunken quarrel. When it came time for him to be sentenced to death, Lord Eskgrove, who sat on the bench from 1784 to 1805, is quoted as having said:

"Prisoner at the Bar! Not only did you murder your victim, whereby he was bereft of his life, but you did add to your crime by thrusting and projecting, or pushing or propelling or piercing the lethal weapon through the belly-band of his regimental breeches, which said breeches were the property of His Majesty, the King!"

magic of ah cheng

by...Charlotte and Dan Ross

Serak was an extremely unpleasant person — even as he was winning, and Death, unknown to him, was close.

MEI WONG, proprietor of the Bombay Art & Curio Company, stood with his back to the large window overlooking the bay. Sitting before him was Inspector Bannerjee of the Bombay police. "As soon as I decided the man was a thief," he said, "I brought out a few other items of jewelry for his consideration. And so distracting his attention switched the genuine emerald necklace for a cheap replica."

Inspector Bannerjee made a final entry in his notebook and snapped it closed. A smile flashed across his lean bronze features as he looked up at the elderly Chinese. "You certainly saved yourself a bit of money with that move."

Mei Wong shrugged and indicated the room crowded with precious porcelain, brass and other antique treasures. "One must be alert to protect all this. In my youth I had a consuming interest in conjuring and studied the art with a famed practitioner —Ah Cheng."

Inspector Bannerjee got up. "He taught you well. I'll circu-

Mei Wong, elderly antiques dealer with a peculiar affinity for violent thoughts, and increasingly well known to British and Canadian readers, makes a second appearance in these pages. Material by the authors, who live in New Brunswick, Canada, has been featured on the Canadian radio.

late a description of the thief and we'll see what happens. At any rate your loss has been small."

As Mei Wong escorted his visitor to the door he had a sudden afterthought. Stopping, he touched the Inspector's arm. "There is one other matter on which I would appreciate your advice," he said.

"And that is?" The Inspector stared at him politely.

"The daughter of an English friend of mine has placed herself in a difficult position." The old man hesitated and then asked, "You know all about Walter Serak, of course?"

"We are quite aware of his activities," Inspector Bannerjee nodded.

"This girl, not much more than a youngster, has become infatuated with the man. Now she is threatening to leave her home and go live with him."

The Inspector pursed his lips, then said: "Serak is one of the most dangerous criminals in our city. A leader of organized racketeers. Unfortunately we have not yet been able to directly charge him."

"I assume there is little prospect the police will be able to act against this Serak in the near future?" Mei Wong said.

"That is right. I wish it were otherwise."

Mei Wong's expression was grave. "It is serious business for my good friends."

"I'm sorry I can offer no help."

"I understand Serak lives at the Royal Hotel," Mei Wong said.

Inspector Bannerjee nodded. "But if you're considering interceding I doubt if words—any words—would have an effect on him. Walter Serak would only respond to much more forceful action."

That evening, in spite of Inspector Bannerjee's pessimistic views, Mei Wong took the elevator to the seventh floor of the Royal Hotel and Walter Serak's suite. He knocked at the door and after a moment a turbanned servant let him in. Serak, in an expensively-tailored dinner jacket, was seated at a table playing cards with three other men. Mei Wong recognized one of them from a photo in the *Standard* in connection with a recent underworld slaying.

"Good evening," the suave, hard-faced Serak recognized him immediately and halting the game rose to greet him, "it is an honor to have such a renowned art dealer pay me a visit."

"I am sorry to disturb your game," the old Chinese said, "I have come to see you on a personal matter."

"I haven't much time. So speak right out," Serak bantered, gesturing toward the sombre henchmen around the table,

"These gentlemen are my closest friends. We have no secrets."

Wong sensed the man knew why he had come and was not in a mood to be reasoned with. Still, he felt he must make some attempt. "I'd like to speak to you regarding a young woman we both know," he began, "and I—"

Serak interrupted him with a belligerent laugh. "Of course. I should have guessed. The Pearson girl. You might have saved yourself the trouble. That's all settled. We're leaving tomorrow on a little trip—a sort of honeymoon."

Tomorrow, Mei Wong considered, there was less time than he had hoped. He stood in humiliated silence. After a long moment he looked at Serak, "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come."

Serak took his arm, "Why not?" He laughed easily and led him forward, "join our little game and celebrate my good fortune."

An ugly-looking man at the table stared at the art dealer bleakly, "I don't advise it," he said, "we've all been heavy losers tonight. Serak has a winning streak."

Mei Wong now stood close to the table. He eyed the stacked deck of cards on it intently. "I can't join you," he said with a meaning smile, "but if you will allow me—I would like to amuse you for a moment."

Before Serak or the men at the table had time to make a comment Mei Wong quickly picked up the cards and shuffled them. Then holding out the deck to the ugly man he said: "select a card, show it to the others—and remember it."

The ugly man selected a card from the center of the pack and let the others look at it. Mei Wong lay the pack on the table again. "Without allowing me to see your card, return it to the top of the deck," he said. The ugly man did so. Mei Wong then ordered: "Shuffle them well."

His interest captured, the ugly man gave the pack a thorough shuffle and put it on the table. "Now if the others will cut the deck, in turn," Mei Wong suggested.

They obeyed quietly.

When they were finished the art dealer took the deck in his hands and began dealing the cards face up. He stopped with the queen of diamonds. "Your card, sir?" he enquired.

The ugly man's face was a study. "Yes," he said, "it is."

Mei Wong nodded with another bland smile. "I thought you would be interested," and he made his way to the door.

He was seated at his desk making entries in a large black ledger when Inspector Bannerjee hurried in next morning.

The Inspector's thin face was tense with excitement. "Yesterday we discussed your making a

call on Walter Serak. Did you visit him as you planned?"

Mei Wong looked up at him amiably. "Yes. I did see him for a few minutes last night. Is there something wrong?"

"Walter Serak was stabbed to death about eleven-thirty, following a gambling session. Was the game going on when you were there?"

"Yes," the art dealer touched his delicate fingertips together thoughtfully, "I didn't know any of them. They were an unpleasant lot."

"Did you get anywhere with Serak?"

"No. I could see it was useless to reason with him. And I left."

The Inspector said: "And there is nothing else you remember?"

Mei Wong smiled. "Yes. One other thing. I did a card trick for them."

Inspector Bannerjee shook his head hopelessly and sank in the chair opposite the art dealer, "You're a strange one. I never know what to expect from you."

"It is really quite interesting," Mei Wong reached in his desk and produced a pack of cards. He fanned them out, face downward: "Now take a card," he said.

With a melancholy grin Inspector Bannerjee gave in and selected one. Then Mei Wong repeated the trick of the previous night. This time he stopped at the eight of hearts. "Your card?" he asked.

"Interesting!" — the Inspector admitted, "of course you use some sort of special deck."

"Not at all—this is an ordinary deck. The effect is the result of skill."

Inspector Bannerjee stared at him. "When you did this trick in Serak's room last night, did you use the cards they were playing with?"

"Of course."

The Inspector jumped up. "And Serak had been the winner all evening! Surely you knew the first idea that would come into the minds of that scum he had at the table with him? And what they'd do when they were certain it was a marked deck?"

Mei Wong spread his hands and smiled . . .

THE saint's RATINGS

Where were you

when the shot was fired? You had better be sure—or you may find yourself on the wrong end of a murder rap. The old-fashioned private eye—a sort of perambulating hardware counter (iron-jawed, steel-nerved, gimlet-eyed) — is on the way out. At least it looks that way. And the amateur is getting his day—that might even be you. ***In this month's volumes only one crime solver is a dyed-in-the-whiskey detective. The others are a lawyer, a publisher, a bank teller and an escaped convict. A motley crew. About all they have in common with old Iron Jaw is the ability to get beaten up, then stumble into the right bed at the right time. Seems to be a sign for the good though. For the first time since detectives were invented, we find the ratings without a single pitchfork.***

OUR RATING SYSTEM:

- Three haloes: Outstanding
- Two haloes: Above average
- One halo: Passable reading
- A pitchfork: For the ashcan

COME BACK FOR MORE, by Al Fray (Dell, 25¢)

Along with the biggest murder weapon ever used—an 8-ton truck—this yarn reveals an inside glimpse of the trucking racket. Fray is a 3-dimensional writer who believes in a detailed survey of his topic. (You will remember his low-down on rolling ivories in THE DICE SPELLED MURDER). But do not let this spoil a rough-and-tumble story. You'll like it.

BREATHE NO MORE MY LADY, by Ed Lacy (Avon, 35¢)

It had to come. A paperback murder mystery about a writer of paperback murder mysteries. Lacy doesn't bite the hand that feeds him though—just nibbles it a little bit. And always in a most enjoyable way. With a healthy dash of the most realistic sex that has been around in quite awhile.

A BULLET FOR A BLONDE, by Paul Kruger (Dell, 25¢)

A neatly composed little murder-quiz that should keep you guessing right up to the finish line. The cute blonde has a hole in the head and can hardly be seen behind the wealth of Clues to the Killer. It will still be a wary reader who can solve this problem as fast as gimlet-eyed Vince Latimer.

MURDER COMES CALLING, by Malcolm Douglas (Gold Medal, 25¢)

A turnabout played fairly, when the stuffed-shirt hero is deflated by an alley cat wife who had every man in town making a detour through her bedroom. These amorous calisthenics are woven into a murder plot that shakes *everything* upside down.

THE MOB SAYS MURDER, by Albert Conroy (Gold Medal, 25¢)

A jailbreak is staged just to crack Driscoll out of gaol, and that proves to be only the beginning of his troubles. Every man's hand is turned against him—as well as those of his ex-wife. But don't feel sorry for him. He does great for himself in a tough story with a violent end.

no witness

by . . . Robert Bloch

THE man's name was Cool, and that's what he was. A real cool cat, walking into the big apartment building as if he owned it.

Cool didn't own it and he did not have a pad there—in fact, he couldn't raise enough scratch to pay the rent for a day in a layout like this.

But if everything went right, he'd have all the scratch he needed in an hour or so. Enough scratch to buy himself a castle on Cloud Number Nine.

Cool stopped in front of the entrance and peeked through the glass doors, casing the lobby. Not a soul around this afternoon. Good. Now if he was lucky, he'd get up the stairs without bumping into anyone. No sense risking the elevator. Besides, Dave's pad was only on the third floor.

He needed to sit down. He had the shakes that bad. He needed something that'd soothe the burning dryness.

Cool had never been in Dave's apartment, but he knew where it was, all right. He'd been right up to the door just a week ago, when he came in dressed like a deliveryman and took a wax impression so that he could get a key made.

There hadn't been any hitches then, and there wouldn't be any

There is a quietly "gone" touch to the writing of Robert Bloch, both when he turns a gently skeptical eye on the coming years — in science fiction, and when he turns to crime fiction, as in this report on the troubles of a real cool cat who thought he had the caper all grooved

now. Cool had this little caper all grooved.

So when he got inside the lobby and started up the stairs, it wasn't fear that made his heart pound. It was just excitement, and maybe he was feeling his kicks a little from the sniff he'd taken before he started out.

But he had everything under control; he'd just taken a short bang. Cool wasn't one of those crazy mainliners. Maybe he had a small monkey for a pet, but he never let it climb on his back. Cool knew what he was doing every minute of the way.

He knew that Dave was a fence. He knew that two weeks ago Dave had taken on a big haul —a load of ice ticketed at eighty Gs in the downtown jewelry store from which it had been snatched. Diamond bracelet and matching earrings: twenty-two perfect stones in the bracelet alone.

Cool was quite certain of this, because he happened to be along when the ice was snatched by his boss, Ferelli. Ferelli turned the stuff right over to Dave to dispose of, but it was too hot to move yet.

When it moved, Ferelli would get maybe forty Gs from Dave. He'd keep half for himself and split the rest up among the six other guys who were in on the deal. And Cool was only a lookout; Ferelli never trusted him with anything important. Said he was a junkie, said he just kept him around for laughs. So Cool would maybe get a grand out of the whole business as his share.

That's what Ferelli thought, but Cool had other ideas. Better ones. He was sick and tired of playing stooge to that dumb guy. He was sick and tired of being kicked around, taking a ribbing, watching the big men like Ferelli and Dave ride the gravy-train.

With the ice up in Dave's apartment he could blow town, blow the country. Only Dave and Ferelli would ever know he had it, and by the time they figured it out, he'd be far, far away. They'd never holler copper, and they didn't have a big enough organization to come after him.

So long as nobody actually caught him in the act, he was safe.

Cool went up the stairs, moving quietly. If he ran into anyone, all he'd have to do was turn around and come down again—there was nothing about his appearance to make anyone suspicious, and he didn't have a thing on him except a pair of gloves in one pocket.

But he didn't want to be seen and spoil this chance. Because today was all set. Cool knew that Dave was out at the track this afternoon, he'd checked on that. In fact, Dave owned a piece of one of the nags running in the seventh. That was the last race, so there was no chance of Dave coming home early.

All Cool needed was a little

while in the apartment, alone. The ice would be there. That's where Dave operated; from his own pad. And Dave was one of the smart boys, one of the fat boys—he'd never stash the stuff in a safe. Not in his business, where he was dealing with safe-crackers who'd be tempted to come up and make a haul. No, Dave would play it clever; he'd hide it away somewhere around the joint.

Cool was hep. Everybody knocked him for a two-bit hophead, but he was hep. He could figure out what Dave was thinking, and he knew he could also figure out where Dave would stow the loot. The trouble with fat boys like Dave was that they got too cocky. They got so they underestimated the other cats. Well, this time he had a surprise coming. When he found that the ice was gone it would be a real sad scene.

The third floor hallway was deserted. Cool walked slowly, walked softly over the big, thick rug. This was a class layout, built for the big fat Daves of this world. It burned Cool just to think about it, but he made himself come off that kick. Now was the time to be calm.

Now was the time to stop in front of the door to 305. Now was the time to get out the gloves and put them on. Now was the time to take one last look up and down the hall, then find the key and stick it in the lock and turn and open the door and walk in and close the door behind him, very quietly.

There.

He was inside. He was safe.

Cool stood in the big living-room and looked around. The venetian blinds were closed against the afternoon sun, but even in the dimness he could see that Dave really had himself a ball living here.

There was all this Swedish Modern furniture (come to think of it, what was so modern about the Swedes, anyhow?) and a big color TV set, and a crazy bar.

Cool snapped on the overhead lights, to get a better look. Now he could see two doors leading into hallways off the front room. One of them probably opened on the bedrooms and the other hall would go out to the kitchen. He had an itch to take a look at the whole joint, but that would be wasting time. The fastest way was to work one room at a time. Then he wouldn't mess things up any more than he had to.

The carpet here in the living-room was even deeper than the stuff in the outside corridors. Cool could move around without making a sound, and that's just what he wanted.

He took a deep breath. All right, where should he begin?

The first step was to check the pictures on the walls. If there *was* any kind of a safe, chances were it would be hidden behind a pic-

ture. There were four of them, big ones.

He made the rounds, pushing them to one side and then carefully straightening them again. No safe. He took the trouble to run his hands along the backs of the pictures, though: sometimes a cat would hide his skins in behind there. But the pictures were clean.

There was another picture on the top of the big TV set, just a photograph in a frame. Cool went over and picked it up.

It was a snazzy silver-framed studio portrait of a dame, the kind that cost a lot of dough. From the looks of her, the dame would cost a lot of dough, too. She had long hair, and big wide eyes, and one of those innocent-looking smiles that heats up the old stoker, particularly when it goes along with the kind of figure this dame had. There was nothing innocent about her figure, or the kind of lowcut dress it was busting out of.

Cool ran his gloves over the back of the photograph, not feeling anything, but all the while he was staring at the picture of the dame. Dave's dame. Chances were, she lived here with him—he'd have her out at the races with him today. Showing her off in front of a bunch of sad two-dollar bets like Cool. Dave was the kind of character who'd get his kicks from doing that.

Once again Cool could feel himself coming on mad. In his skull he was calling Dave all kinds of names, and calling her all kinds of names, but he knew he didn't mean it. At least, he didn't mean it about her. He was just trying to con himself out of the real score. Which was that he'd do anything to be in Dave's shoes, and park them under the bed of a dame like this. Just thinking about it made him want to blow his stack.

But that wouldn't help. What he had to do was find Dave's ice. Then he'd be set. With Dave's ice he could get something like Dave's dame.

Cool put the picture back where he'd gotten it from and started to work on the furniture. He had a regular pocketknife, because in case anything had gone wrong he didn't want to be caught with a big shiv on him. But the pocketknife was enough. He sort of hated to wreck anything; still, he had to do it. He slit up the sofa-cushions and the back, too, and then he did the same thing with all the chairs.

No dice.

He turned the lamps upside down, looking for hollow bases. He emptied the vases. Even though he figured Dave wouldn't be fool enough to leave anything lying around in a desk-drawer, he went through the desk.

A big nothing.

Well, there was still the bar. He opened it up. Lots of glittering glasses, but no diamonds.

Cool looked at his watch. He'd been here just about twenty-five minutes. No need to worry, yet. And come to think of it, the living-room was just a long shot. Dave would be too smart to plant his sparklers there.

So he'd have to start going through the rest of the house. Which hall should he take first?

Cool decided to turn left. This was a short hall. A few steps down was the bathroom door. That looked promising.

The fluorescent light shimmered on, hitting all the black marble tiling. Big shower, big tub. Cool wasn't much interested. He knelt right down and began to examine the plumbing. Catch-basins, toilet-tanks—these were the places where smart apples liked to stash valuables.

A blank.

Cool took out his knife and slit open the bath-mat. He got into the linen-closet and cleaned out the towel-supply. There wasn't a prayer here.

Then he got into the medicine-cabinet. Sure enough, the dame must live here because he spotted a lot of cold-cream, stuff like that. Cool made sure to poke around in all the jars.

No sale.

So he closed up, feeling glad about the gloves and not leaving any prints. Then he went down the hall and there he was in the kitchen.

It was a big layout, that kitchen, and when he saw all the cupboards and stuff Cool knew that he'd have to spend time if he wanted to do a thorough job. His watch told him he'd been here fifty minutes so far. Fifty minutes—almost an hour! Cool did some quick figuring. The kitchen alone might take another hour. And if he didn't hit, there were still the bedrooms off the other hall, with closets and stuff. Say another hour and a half. That would make three and a half hours—and he couldn't count on this much time.

No, the ice had better be out here in the kitchen. It better be; his luck couldn't hold forever.

In spite of himself, Cool knew the panic was coming on. Coming on strong. He wished he'd brought along an extra snort. Now that the stuff was wearing off, he was beginning to feel real dragged. This whole caper didn't look so good when he thought it over now. How the hell could he be so sure Dave would keep the ice in the house? It was just a hunch, nothing more. Cool didn't really know too much about Dave or the way he operated. Hadn't even known about Dave's chick, for that matter. And the way he'd banged up here, just barged in without even bothering to ring, wasn't smart at all. Suppose somebody had been home? Suppose somebody came in now? And the wristwatch was ticking away, louder and louder, and there was

that thumping paradiddle in his chest—

Get with it, man! Cool told himself. *Don't hang me, Dad.* But he was hanging himself. He had the shakes, he needed to sit down, he needed something to take the burning dryness out of his throat. A nice cold drink. A bucket of ice-water. Or some milk, maybe.

Why not? There was a big refrigerator here, right next to the stove. Cool walked over and opened the door. Sure enough, two bottles of milk—one half-empty and one full.

The full one would be fresher. Cool reached for it and started to snap the cap. Then he noticed that the cap wasn't on tight. It looked as if this bottle had been opened before. But it was full.

He started to tilt it and something clicked.

Something clicked, all right.

Cool whipped over to the sink and then he was pouring the milk down the drain, and then he knew he'd hit the jackpot.

The ice was in the bottle—bracelet and earrings—and it made a pretty picture. Richest damned milk Cool had ever seen.

That Dave was a solid cat, all right, but Cool had found his cream. He emptied the bottle and started to slide the stones out, and then—

She walked in.

She hadn't gone to the races with Dave, after all, and she must have been sleeping in one of the bedrooms because she was wearing a blue negligee.

The way she stood in the kitchen doorway, the light went right through it. Cool could see a lot, and it was even better than the photograph. Her hair was the color of taffy-apples and her wide eyes were the same shade of blue as that thing she was wearing. She was a dame, a doll, a dish, a dream.

And she was also a nightmare, because she just stood there staring at him and she said, "Who are you?"

Cool wished she hadn't said that. He wished she'd just stood there in the doorway so that he could look at her forever.

But she said, "Who are you?" and that tore it. Tore everything. He didn't have any answers. And even if he did, she could describe him to Dave, or Ferelli, so it was no use just grabbing the ice and making a run for it now. Any more than it would work if he just knocked her out. She was a witness.

There was only one thing to do, and he had to do it fast, before she decided to scream.

Cool did it.

He crossed the room in two steps and he put up his gloved hands and he did it. She screamed then, but he couldn't hear it—he could only feel it, deep in her throat, underneath his fingers. Then he was shaking her and her eyes got wider and wider, and now

the scream was dying away in her throat and everything was dying because he was choking it to death.

Then she began to fight. He could feel her nails clawing at his wrists and hands, tearing the flesh. He squeezed harder, hoping she wouldn't scratch his face.

All at once her hands went limp. Her eyes bugged and her face got purple before he decided it was safe to let go. When she hit the floor her tongue flopped out of her mouth and he didn't want to look at her any more, but he had to. He felt for a pulse. There was no pulse. And no witness.

Cool knew he was safe again.

Why did she have to come in just then? Why hadn't she stayed asleep another three minutes, until he could have gotten out of there? Why did she have to see him?

Well, it was done. And no sense crying over spilled milk.

Spilled milk. He needed a drink worse than ever, now, but there was no time. He just scooped up the ice.

And then he ran.

He ran for six hours straight, but it was all according to plan. First he called up Ferelli, doing the dumb bit, asking if the ice had been sold and if he could collect his split yet. Ferelli hadn't heard a word. But Cool knew that calling this way would cover him until after he got out of town.

Then he took care of his plane reservations for L. A. When he had his ticket nailed down he wrapped the ice in a neat little package and mailed it to himself, care of General Delivery, Los Angeles Post Office.

After that he was ready to pack and powder.

That's the way he'd planned it, and that's the way it should have worked out.

When they nabbed him at the airport, Cool still wasn't too worried. There was nothing to tie him to any jewel robbery. Even when he realized nobody was talking about the ice and that this was a routine roundup of suspects because of the murder, Cool didn't crack.

After all, just because Dave had called the cops when he found the body didn't mean they could pin anything on Cool. The cops would be rounding up fifty or a hundred guys tonight, covering the airport and the depot and the bus terminal and hauling in everybody who was leaving town. But they didn't have anything more on Cool than they had on the rest of them. He'd taken care of that. He'd taken care of the only possible witness. And he hadn't left any fingerprints.

Down at the station it turned out the cops weren't interested in fingerprints. But they were interested in the scratches on his wrists. They dug around and came away with some more of his skin, and

nobody listened to his fast alibi and nobody let him call a lawyer.

They ran some lab tests, first. Turned out they'd found shreds of skin under the dead dame's fingernails. Cool knew how they'd gotten there.

After the reports on the tests came back, the cops knew how they'd gotten there, too. And then, everything came on bad.

They noticed how he was shaking and they must have figured out he was bugged, because finally they promised him a snort if he'd tell them all about it. And Cool told them all about it, knowing it wouldn't do any good to dummy up now.

They got the D.A. in and his stenographer took everything down. Cool explained the whole pitch, but when he got to the rough part, about the murder, he threw away the book and began to cry.

The D.A. wouldn't let up, though.

"I understand about the jewels," he told Cool. "And if you'd stuck to your original plan, the chances are you might have gotten away with it. But why did you spoil everything by killing that girl? She didn't know who you were—why didn't you just sneak out?"

"Because she saw me, man," Cool wailed. "Didn't matter if she knew who I was or not—she could still describe me to Dave, and then the heat would be on. I had to kill her. She was a witness. Standing there staring at me—"

He broke down again, and he almost didn't hear what the D.A. was saying.

Almost, but not quite.

"She wasn't a witness, Cool. Even if she stared. I guess you didn't know it, but Dave's girl was like Justice. She was blind."

TALENTED FOX

A young English hunter, a couple of months ago, seriously wounded a fox with a blast from his double-barreled shotgun. When the fox took refuge in a hole, he thrust the butt of the gun in after it, on which the gun fired, peppering his arm with shot.

He staggered across the fields and collapsed at the feet of a neighbor, who followed the bloody trail back to the hole and pulled out the gun. The paw of the dead fox was hooked around the trigger.

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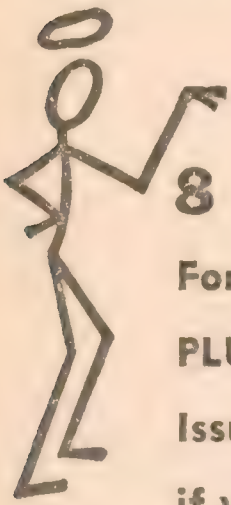

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what's new in crime

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

Recent essays in the somewhat deadly arts — novels that you will wish to relax with, and novels that you will remember.

DORIS MILES DISNEY has always had an uncanny gift for taking a neighborhood—perhaps even a street very much like the one around the corner from where you live—and making it come to life with all its currents and its cross-currents, its joys and its fears. As I have said before, it is writers like her who are the true social historians of our times, describing as they do, far differently and far more vividly than others, how we and our kind live in these days.

You turn to memoirs, and to such correspondence as has survived, if you are interested not so much in *what* happened as in how people reacted to the happenings in those decades when a man named Napoleon seemed like a shadow over Europe, and you turn to memoirs and you turn to letters, to official correspondence and to the press of the day, if you want to get the feeling of what the man in the street thought, what the planters and the merchants in the South thought, and how life was for the pioneers in the frontier settlements in this country, during those same years . . . And again you turn to the memoirs—and to

Again comments on current mystery and suspense novels, including two that our friend on the Saint's Ratings desk would normally have discussed, —novels which, in their variety, illustrate this column's frequent preachment that there is no such thing as one *definition of the mystery novel.*

the letters (the Victorians were indefatigable letter writers)—and to the novels of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, and to those other sources which reflect the life of the day, for a feeling of those days, a hundred years ago now, when the Sepoy Mutiny—and not a man named Nasser—was news . . .

Doris Miles Disney's latest novel, BLACK MAIL (Doubleday, $2.95), dedicated to the Postal Inspection Service, describes what happens when Lucia Ruyter, working in a bank in a small Connecticut town, finds herself the subject of a series of pointedly obscene, anonymous letters. It is only a matter of time before Postal Inspector Madden realizes that while he may be able to save Lucia's reputation, he may not be able to save her life. Excellent characterizations. Vivid background. Recommended.

Devotees of Dr. Gideon Fell will welcome his latest adventure, in sedate Queens College, Virginia, in John Dickson Carr's THE DEAD MAN'S KNOCK (Harper's, $2.95). Dr. Fell may have aged a little, he wheezes heavily, "his chins sunk into his collar, a hand on the crutch head of each cane," and he may be a shade obscure at times, but it is understandable that the local police welcome his interest in this curious murder, apparently inspired by a Wilkie Collins novel.

Georges Simenon's literary output is compared by his publishers with "another man of French birth, Alexandre Dumas."

Perhaps.

The legend of the incredibly prolific Dumas ignores the conditions under which he worked, the times in which he lived, the demands on his generation which saw changes no less momentous than those we ourselves now live through. Alexandre Dumas as a more careful researcher than is generally realized, as a social historian reflecting in his writings the mores of his times, should not be judged in terms of the standards of these days. Admitted that there were times when he rewrote history (what historical novelist is innocent of this?) there was however an innocent quality to his portraiture of the mores of his or other times, a quality lacking in the writings of many today, Simenon included. Georges Simenon's novels about Maigret have been, with few exceptions, superb studies of French police procedure, but some of his other work, as now—IN CASE OF EMERGENCY (Doubleday, $3.50), leaves you with mixed feelings.

We are told that "this is a book with adult attitudes for mature minds." Again perhaps.

I am afraid I have mixed feelings about this exploration into minds "trapped by a driving need for sexual love"—this story of a man obsessed by his mistress, a

man who has made a career out of defending scum, as he says, and who intends to continue to do so.

Yes, yes, I am not denying that this, *too,* is "life." But I question the validity of the feeling that here, *because* of this "realism," we have an important novel. . . .

There is an interesting trend in this field where you scream yourself to sleep—as a prelude to murder, and where you go through days and months and years revelling in your frustrations, in your lost dreams, in your lost ambitions. This, you may protest, is a neurotic world—considerably more neurotic than in the circles where expatriates from *The Paris Review* and points slightly-to-the-left suffer the tortures of the damned as they write Madison Avenue advertising copy. But it so happens that it is a very real world, an uncomfortably real world, glimpses of which are seen in novels such as John Roeburt's THE LUNATIC TIME, originally published by Simon and Schuster and recently reissued as DID YOU KILL MONA LEEDS? (Crest Books, 25 cents). There is an obvious temptation to shrug off these increasingly frequent explorations, novelized, of those minds—to call them sick or maladjusted is an over-simplification—whom life has somehow passed by, but to do so is unfair. They do not make pleasant reading it is true, but *without* being exercises in erotica—disguised as psychological novels, novels like Roeburt's portrait of a lonely man *do* reflect an aspect of these times. . . .

My mother's first reaction, at the news that there was a new novel by Aaron Marc Stein, was regret that it wasn't another book about Elsie Mae and Tim, and I understand there is a hard core of enthusiasts, in the big cities and in the hinterland, who share her feelings for the two archaeologists. Unfortunately these are times which impose certain concessions upon workers in this field —hence SITTING UP DEAD (Doubleday, $2.95), dedicated, incidentally, to "the necropolis set."

Just as Stein's earlier novels made many friends for Mexico, you will find yourself tempted to take the next plane or ship for Rome after reading this novel. Stein has this ability to make the background of his novels come alive. You are there with Matt Erridge, on the streets and in the restaurants and on the roads near Rome. You smell the smells that he smells. You react to the things he reacts to, and you understand his attitude towards life as, inbetween increasingly violent adventures, he shows lovely—and very American—Gail Scorby around the Eternal City.

status quo at troyden's

by . . . Harlan Ellison

He had expected to live out his remaining years in this place, with the others whom life had passed by. And now—

A MATTER of twenty dollars threatened Mr. Huggerson's universe.

This universe was fifteen feet by twenty-three feet long, on the second floor of a dingy building on Fourth Street; namely, a ten-dollar-per-week room in Harry Troyden's flophouse. Mr. Huggerson had inhabited this particular corner of the universe for close to eight years, and it suited him just nicely, thank you.

But now, from the blue, Ralph had written him a very polite note—well, not written; typed, and at the bottom Mr. Huggerson had seen RH:et and that meant Ralph's secretary had typed the note—and the meaning of the letter had been the cold wash of fear to Mr. Huggerson.

He lifted the single sheet of paper for the hundredth time that day, and read it through once more.

He knew nothing would have changed on the paper, but he read it again, as though the shock would diminish, should he absorb the words many times. They did not, of course, but again he read:

Somebody once said that Harlan Ellison, if he made up his mind to do it, could undoubtedly sell you the Brooklyn Bridge. We're inclined to guess this is no exaggeration. Aggressive, and rather prolific, Ellison—now in the Army and stationed at Fort Knox—is one of the most promising of the younger writers.

"Dear Dad:

"You will notice that this month's check is slightly less than usual. I'm really sorry about this, but I've had some awfully big expenditures out here on the Coast, and with the Fry-Burger System opening up here, giving me such stiff competition, every penny counts.

"So I'm sure you will understand, and not think too unkindly of me. Greta and the kids are just fine, and they send their love. Let us hear from you more often.

Love, *Ralph.*"

The check had been for only fifty dollars. Slightly less, not a bit. Twenty dollars less. With seventy a month, Mr. Huggerson had been able to pay ten dollars a week for the room, and have thirty left over for food, cleaning and the newspaper every evening. But with fifty dollars, oh that was something else again. It was just impossible to think what it meant at first, then the truth slowly dawned on Mr. Huggerson.

It would mean Harry Troyden would turn him out, if he could not pay the rent each Saturday. Turned away from the few friends he knew—the aging and toothless men who had, with almost lemming-like magnetism, come to Troyden's to die away their last years.

Mr. Huggerson was a special case at Troyden's. Where most of the other twenty-seven old men who resided there were kept in room and board by social security pittances, old army pensions, small returns from investments made years before, or company pension plans, Mr. Huggerson was supported solely by the gratuitous doles of his West Coast son, Ralph, owner of the Starlite Eatery chain.

Mr. Huggerson had owned and operated a small grocery on the corner of Elm and Mitchell Streets for thirty years, and had saved considerable money, which he used to put Ralph through college and merchandising school; then, soon after Ralph had borrowed the remaining ten thousand in Mr. Huggerson's account, to open the first Starlite Eatery, the chain grocery had opened a shining supermarket half a block away on Elm.

Mr. Huggerson had gone out of business in two years.

After a frightening period of dislocation, and the eventual sale of the home Georgette and he had shared for ten years—and in which he had resided after her untimely death from pneumonia—he had come to Troyden's. Ralph had been faithful about sending the seventy dollars each month and Mr. Huggerson had settled into the warm sun and solitude of the flophouse, thinking this might not be such a bad way to end his days after all. For

the other old men of the place were mild and interesting companions, bound together as they were in the sheaf of weariness and weak bladders and bannister-holding as they walked upstairs. They spent many evenings around the radio, listening to the remaining few shows they remembered from the old days. And when the air waves were filled with music, rock n' roll and classical, they turned inward and poured warmth and reminiscence at one another.

There were pleasant walks in the street, and gin rummy with Mr. Bonheim and Mr. Zeckhauser who had once been in the garment industry, and who talked knowingly of grosses and workhours. All summed, it was a pleasant life; at seventy dollars a month.

But fifty dollars was the end of the universe.

Mr. Huggerson let the slip of paper fall from his fingers. It slid through the air and landed atop last evening's newspaper. It lay beside the check, drawn on the Western State Security & Trust Bank.

Mr. Huggerson ran a shaking hand up his face. He could feel the wrinkles that rolled up from his thin chin and made shaving so difficult these days. He had the terrible, overpowering feeling that he was a chipmunk on a treadmill.

It was, of course, impossible to try and live on ten dollars a month for food and cleaning and the newspaper. Since he could not talk the grocery or the dry cleaner or the fellow in the newsstand into cutting the price of their respective wares, there was only one way out. He would have to go to Harry Troyden and ask him to lower the rent on the room.

The room was on the side of the building facing the street; and though grit came in through the open Summer windows, still, the breeze and the sun did the same, and Mr. Huggerson was willing to suffer the one, to obtain the others. He had a bed that was not too hard and not too soft, though it was built on a low metal frame and squeaked hideously during one of Mr. Huggerson's nightly coughing fits. In addition, there was a table, an imitation fireplace that had been built when Troyden's was a fashionable apartment house in the Twenties, an easy chair much the worse for many tenants having taken their ease in it, and a low bookshelf that contained four books: a Gideon bible, a copy of Dreiser's "Chains," Zane Grey's "Under The Tonto Rim" and the Fall 1948 edition of the *Readers Digest* Condensed Books.

It was a familiar room, a warm room for Mr. Huggerson, and all the universe he needed.

True, it was well worth the ten dollars per week he paid for

its use, and the use of the bathroom down the hall, but he would have to go to Harry Troyden, and make him lower the rent. It was the only way.

The decision had not come to Mr. Huggerson in an incendiary fashion; he had considered it for two days, since first reading Ralph's letter. Had he not been a proud man, seeking respect and peace in these final years, he would have packed up and moved to another — cheaper — rooming house. But eight years in this room, with his friends about him, had brought a slightly vegetable aspect to his life. To move now would be the end; he knew he would die inside a month, should his roots be torn free of even such poor soil as Troyden's had been.

So he knew, after two days of contemplating every possibility, that he must go to Harry Troyden's room on the third floor, and discuss with him the lowering of the rent to meet the reduced finances allocated to Mr. Huggerson. But first, he had to summon his strength.

He spoke to Mr. Zeckhauser over that evening's checker match in the other's room on the first floor.

"I heard from my son, Ralph, the other day," Mr. Huggerson opened the conversation in a distant fashion.

"Ah-hm." Mr. Zeckhauser bent his bugle-like nose to the checker board; he was a serious player. Every game was a life and death struggle; victory meant freedom of breath and the head held high; defeat meant momentary but painful oblivion. "Ah-hm."

"He, uh, says money is very tight in California," Mr. Huggerson went on, pointedly. It was his move. He blocked Mr. Zeckhauser's attempt to yoke two pieces.

Zeckhauser looked up, his rheumy eyes settling on a point between Mr. Huggerson's thin, wrinkled, half-shaven chin and the knot of the wide, flowered tie. He disapproved of that tie—holdover that it was from the Forties—but he had made a point of concealing his distaste out of respect and friendship for Mr. Huggerson. But conversation during a checkers match was another matter.

He sat back on the bed, and folded his veined hands across his wide stomach.

"What is the matter this evening, Mr. Huggerson? You seem singularly distracted. Is there something with which I can be of service?"

Mr. Huggerson pulled at his nose in confusion; he had not expected such perceptiveness in the other.

"Well, sir, I do have a bit of a problem . . . I find myself in a singular quandary." He had picked up many of the flowery speech habits affected by Mr. Zeckhauser.

Too, he looked up to Mr. Zeckhauser, for that worthy rented the *ne plus ultra* of Troyden's rooms, the fabulous fourteen-dollar-a-week extra large room with private bath; the only one of its kind in the building, located on the first floor. Each of the other twenty-seven men in the flophouse coveted that room—Mr. Huggerson no less than any of them—and it was only because of his investments from pre-bankruptcy days in the garment district that Mr. Zeckhauser was able to afford the room, thus lending him superior status in their ranks. He was, in fact, the elder statesman of the group, and the oracle to whom all problems were eventually brought.

"Is it your boy, Ralph?" Mr. Zeckhauser probed adroitly.

Mr. Huggerson looked down at the board, and nodded back and forth, just the way Mr. Solomon did when he *dovened* over his nightly prayers. "Yes, Ralph has, well, run afoul of some business difficulties, and was forced to cut down on my check. I don't think, that is, I'm not sure I can manage here with what he sent."

Mr. Zeckhauser puffed out his thick lips knowingly. "Ah-hm. And—?"

"Well, sir, I was merely considering the possibility that Mr. Troyden might consider lowering my rent."

The plump Mr. Zeckhauser pushed away the straight-backed chair on which the checker board rested, and stood up. He clasped both hands behind himself, thrust his round little belly out, and paced the room. It was indeed spacious enough for heroic pacing. Mr. Huggerson envied the living space, again.

"You now pay ten dollars the week, Mr. Huggerson. Is that not so, sir?"

Mr. Huggerson admitted it was so.

"To what do you wish Mr. Troyden to reduce your rent?"

Mr. Huggerson had given just that problem a great deal of careful thought. He could pull in his belt a bit on his weekly expenditures, but since they were slim now, he could not cut too much. He had been doing nicely on thirty dollars, after rent. Now if Harry Troyden would settle for six dollars per week, that would be twenty-four dollars, leaving him twenty-six on which to live. Only a four dollar cutback, as Mr. Zeckhauser would phrase it; he could stop having his underwear and socks done at the laundry, wash them himself—though the water might affect his arthritic fingers—and do very nicely. *If* Mr. Troyden would settle for six dollars a week.

He conveyed his reasoning to Mr. Zeckhauser.

"Sir, as we say in the garment industry, 'You are in a serious bind.' I would suggest a great

deal of thought on the matter before speaking to our worthy landlord."

This was no help whatsoever.

They resumed the game; Mr. Huggerson's opinion of Mr. Zeckhauser's opinions was reduced greatly.

However, later in the game, the plumper of the two dropped a bit of gossip that resolved Mr. Huggerson to see Troyden at once. This was:

"I overheard Troyden with his son, that Oscar or Oswald or whatever his name is, this afternoon. They were discussing *raising* rents here. I was, of course, appalled at the mere mention, and was pleased to hear it had not gone beyond the conjecture stage. But then, one never knows.

"Consequently, Mr. Huggerson, sir, ah-hm, I would seriously recommend you not mention your scheme to Mr. Troyden, but try to work out some other, more amicable solution on your own."

Later, Mr. Huggerson bade farewell to his checker partner, and started upstairs to his own room.

He did not stop at the second floor, but continued up to the third. He found himself at Harry Troyden's door, and almost without volition, was softly knocking. From within he heard the sounds of a television set, blaring into the room.

He knocked a bit louder, and a moment later heard a grunted curse, and the sounds of Harry Troyden heaving himself to his feet. "I'm comin', dammit, I'm comin', don't bang the damned thing down—oh, whaddaya want, Huggerson?"

That was one of the things Mr. Huggerson disliked most about Troyden. He always spoke with such profanity and such deprecation, never using the prefatory Mister, that all the residents of the flophouse affected in due respect to one another's age.

"I would like to speak to you a moment, Mr. Troyden." Troyden was a good head taller than Mr. Huggerson, and so looked over the latter's head as he snarled, "Well, okay. C'mon in fer a second." He stood aside, allowing Mr. Huggerson to slipper-footed pad past him into the room.

The room was quite dark, with only the blue-white square of the TV set casting weird shadows along the walls.

Harry Troyden lived in this less-than-sumptuous place, instead of one of his more regal properties uptown, more out of habit than anything else. He had started here, and had extended his holdings only through his son Omar's sharp dealings, and lived here because he had always done so.

He flipped on the lights in the room.

The naked bulbs overhead shone down on him.

Mr. Huggerson marveled

anew, as he did each time he saw Harry Troyden clearly.

Troyden was a subterranean creature brought up from the depths. He was squat and fat, built like a bloated cave-dwelling fish, whose eyes were mere puckers in the fish-white flesh of a totally bald head. He gave the impression of being a toadstool of some sort. From the top of his ridged hairless scalp to the soles of his thick shoes, Harry Troyden was a completely repulsive creature.

Yet, to be sure, Mr. Huggerson reminded himself, pressing his gorge downwards, he *was* the landlord.

"What 'n I do fer ya, Huggerson?" Mr. Troyden asked with half-interest, slumping back into the chair before the TV set; the chair groaned agonizingly, then settled to keeping its misery to itself.

"Well, Mr. Troyden . . ." the stooped, white-haired boarder began slowly, ". . . I—I was wondering how business was, these days, what with—"

"Lousy, bud, just lousy! All of them new buildin's goin' up, they're alla time tearin' down an' makin' the section so hotsy-totsy, ya'd think they'd offer me a little gelt fer my locations. But do they? Hell, no they don't. You know what my kid Omar says to me just this morning? He says—"

Mr. Huggerson cut Troyden off, with what he hoped was not a brusque or rude sound. "Er."

It brought the pale creature back to his late evening visitor. "Yeah. What is it now, Huggerson? I got the thing goin' here an' there's a show on I wanna see what happened. So, what's up?"

"Well, Mr. Troyden," Mr. Huggerson stumbled, then decided to bull it through regardless, "I've found my finances aren't what they were, and I know it isn't the best thing to ask you, since you're a businessman and this is your livelihood, but since I've been here eight years and we're friends—" this was an assumption Mr. Huggerson was making for the first time on either of their parts, "—I felt, well, it isn't so much to ask, but I was wondering if you might consider lowering, that is, *slightly* lowering my rent. You see, if I could pay *six* dollars a week, instead of ten, I could manage to make ends mee—"

Troyden came out of his chair like a porpoise breaking water. "Whajoosay?"

This sudden onslaught brought Mr. Huggerson to instant fright and contrition. He had sinned. More softly, he tried again. "Well, sir, you see, six dollars would be—"

He was poleaxed in midsentence. "Whaddaya talkin'? Whaddaya, crazy or somethin'? You know damn well I can't cut no rents. I been losin' money

on you buncha' creeps fer years now. I onny letcha live on here at the old rents cause it was a sorta what? Status kwo, what my kid Omar said just this mornin'! He warned me, dammit, whyn't I lissen ta him, he says ta me, Pop, he says, this here status kwo gotta change aroun' here, these oldcockers been livin' here, no dough an' like that—well, lissen, Huggerson, I'm gonna tell ya somethin' . . ." he drew a great blast of air.

"Mr. Troyden, I—"

Troyden catapulted on without break. "You lissen here, old man. Lemme hand you some news. You ain't gonna have to pay no ten no more. From now on, damn you old ingrates, you're all gonna pay up rent. From now on that room a' yours is gonna cost ya fifteen bucks a week. An' that starts day after tomorra', Satu'day. An' if ya can't pay, out ya go."

He turned away in anger and crimson blotches on his subterranean paleness. He slumped back into his chair, with mumbled, "Howdja like that? How's 'at for ingrates. Omar was right about that status—"

He never quite finished. Mr. Huggerson had moved with the actions of a zombie as the fat man had turned away. He had lifted the metal ashtray with the heavy weighted base, and moved in behind Troyden's chair. He had known no sense or reason or actual volition, but had felt all energy drain from him as the cruelty and unreasonableness of the landlord's words struck him forcibly. To not get the reduction was bad enough—but to pay half again as *much!* It was horrible, it was horrible, it was torture; he had to put a stop to those words that were terribly, mercilessly destroying his universe. He had to stop the torment of this man. He had to—

Strangely, there had been no blood. The skull was crushed, of that he was certain, but the edge of the ashtray was clean, and there was no blood on the carpet where Troyden had fallen.

Then, and only then, when he had replaced the ashtray, did the horror of what he had done strike him.

Mr. Huggerson stumbled to the sofa, and felt behind himself, before sitting down. He hung his weary head in his shaking hands and for the first time in many years, he cried. It was terrible, this terrible, terrible thing he had done. Simply terrible. Oh, he hadn't meant to do it, he hadn't meant to kill Troyden. It was just that all those words, all those sounds that were so terrible, so terrible, he had had to stop them before they drove him mad.

He had been tailored to fit this place, with all his friends here, and to think he would be driven into the street, it was just too

much, too much for Mr. Huggerson to contemplate. And now —he hesitated to admit it to himself—he was a, a—murderer.

For a long, long time he sat there, shivering, crying sporadically. Finally, he knew he must draw himself together.

This would not do, he told himself. He was a man of pride and resolution, and this would not do. It would also do Ralph no good, were it to be known that his father was a murderer. Bitterly, he thought it did not bother Ralph to have his father living in such a place, why should it bother him if his father were a murderer, but he dismissed the thought as being unworthy.

Then he turned to the problem of fat, dead Harry Troyden.

After a great while of pondering, it came to him, and he acted swiftly.

He took Troyden under the arms with great difficulty, and with a maximum of straining and grunting and sweating, he managed to drag the heavy corpse after him, into the deserted third floor hall. His fingers—swollen and arthritic—were beginning to hurt with a passion, but he struggled with the dead man, inching him along the uncarpeted floor to the edge of the stairs.

Then he managed somehow to stand Harry Troyden's lifeless shell on its feet, and he gently—shoved.

He was in Troyden's room when he heard the crash, and the yells of the other twenty-seven tenants. He managed to slip out and join them unnoticed.

This time, there was a great deal of blood.

After the twenty-eight of them had returned from the P. J. Kyley & Thomas Roseforth Funeral Home, Mr. Huggerson was approached in the upper hall by Omar Troyden.

For a sharp instant, Mr. Huggerson felt fear, but Omar Troyden soon put him at his ease. A warm handshake and ten cent cigar did that quite admirably. Then Troyden drew him into the room Mr. Huggerson had occupied for eight years, and sat down in the easy chair to speak.

If anything, Omar Troyden was a satire of what his father had been. Obese, pasty, bald and squinting, he hunched forward, squizzing his lap into the round pillars of his legs, and said, "Mr. Huggerson, how long have you lived here?"

Mr. Huggerson's spine became clammy and cold. The rent was going to be raised. It had all been for nothing; he was getting his just desserts. He had sinned, and now he was to be turned into the street after all.

"Ei-eight years," he stammered.

Troyden smiled and sat back. "Good, good," he said to the ceiling, with its water stains. "Fine.

You know, Mr. Huggerson, for some time now I've been of the opinion that my father was not running things properly here. It has been losing money for him for some years."

Oh dear, here it comes, thought Mr. Huggerson.

"So I've been intending to do something about the status quo here at Troyden's, ever since father died. It's unfortunate that my father had to fall down those stairs," Omar went on, seemingly undisturbed by the fate of his parent, "but we must take these things philosophically, eh?"

Mr. Huggerson nodded, confused. This did not seem the proper tone to use when raising a man's rent.

"So." Omar spoke the word as a proclamation. "So! What I would like you to do, Mr. Huggerson, and I know this is an imposition, but I felt sure I could ask you, seeing as how you've been here the longest of anyone, what I wanted to ask you is if you would consider managing this place for me."

He waited a second. Mr. Huggerson blew air between his thin, strained lips. "I—I—"

"Yes, I imagined it might be a shock, but you know how it is. I have a great many other interests uptown, and can't be here as my father was. I know you would have only the best interests of the place at heart, seeing as how you live here yourself. So, I wondered if you would consider taking the job. Now, I can't pay much, but aside from well, twenty-five dollars a month, I can guarantee you a room here free of cost. How does that sound?"

"I—I—"

"The work won't be hard," Omar pressed onward. "We have a janitor here who will tend to all the cleaning-up chores, and all you'll have to do, really, is make sure the rents are paid on time, and that no one gets into trouble."

He spoke on at some length, as though he felt he had to sell the job to Mr. Huggerson. Mr. Huggerson, on the other hand, had been sold from the outset, and was merely caught with his throat locked in shock, and was forced to listen to the beauty of it all being poured out by the son of the man he had killed, being unable to interrupt to stop Omar Troyden.

Finally, he agreed, and it was done.

Omar Troyden even shook Mr. Huggerson's hand.

Later that day, when news had gone through the rest of the establishment, and all the twenty-seven tenants knew Mr. Huggerson was to be manager of the flophouse, Mr. Huggerson felt impelled to speak to Mr. Zeckhauser.

He drew the stouter man aside near the desk, and began: "Mr.

Zeckhauser, you have been with us for a good many years, and though we are most happy to have you remain with us, I'm afraid the status quo here at Troyden's is not quite satisfactory. Now there is no reason to be alarmed, but I wanted to speak to you about—"

It was only fair; a man of responsibility should not be compelled to live in a single, ten-dollar-a-week room. It was more fitting, therefore more logical, for a man of Mr. Huggerson's position to occupy a larger room. A fourteen dollar room, with private bath.

Besides, he had never liked "Under The Tonto Rim."

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filial son

by . . . Avram Davidson

Someday it had to end, this fear with which they lived, this fear that death would come for a gentle old man.

PIERCETOWN is located on one of the man bays, sounds, fjords, inlets—call them what you will—which indent that part of the coast. A numerous tribe of Indians once lived there and had developed what anthropologists call "a complex culture," based on edible acorns and seals and salmon. Once in five years or so they would make war on the nearest other tribe and perhaps two or three people on each side would be killed or captured. When Franklin Pierce, Esquire, of New Hampshire, was President, Civilization—in the form of the U. S. Army, covered wagons, rum, rifles, smallpox, tuberculosis, and several less mentionable diseases, arrived in the area. The Indians, of course, have long since departed to gather acorns with their ancestors. Traffic accidents in one week take more lives than the tribal wars did in half a decade. No one nowadays eats the seals.

Piercetown, in the century which has passed since its founding, has grown back from the water. Real estate developers have cut down the old oak

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Avram Davidson, "a gentle classicist" to quote one critic, and a careful craftsman, won first prize—with his first mystery—in the annual EQMM *Contest. His stories have been translated into several languages including one, recently, for dramatization in Hebrew over an Israeli radio station.*

groves, put up hundreds of houses which are, if not identical, at least fraternal, and generously planted spindly little saplings in front of each. One such neighborhood is called, with a bow to the past, Indian Ridge. On the main business street is a nice, big, bright supermarket. It is called Long's; Charles L. Long is the proprietor. He belongs to the V.F.W., the Legion, the Elks, Masons, Rotary, Red Cross, and to several purely local organizations, and every one calls him Charley. He has a pretty wife, a nice ranch-type house, and two children who are widely liked. In many ways he could be considered an average, or typical, American. Like other typical, or average, Americans, he had his own worries which he didn't talk about to everyone. Being of a calm, easy-going disposition, he didn't brood about them constantly. Often he managed to forget about them—sometimes for as much as two or three days.

He arrived home for lunch one afternoon and saw, by his wife's face, that this was going to be one of those days when he would think about his troubles quite a lot.

"What's the matter, Sue?" he asked, after he had kissed her.

"He was driving around again," she said.

"Same guy?"

"The same one. *Yes,*"—she forestalled his next question; "I'm *sure.* A short man with a mole over his eye. He always picks a time when I'm out in the yard,"—the Longs had a corner house—"and he just drives around and he looks at me. Never says a word, doesn't change expression, just drives the car around the block a few times and looks at me."

Charley swore under his breath.

"So I suppose you'll have to go to the bank again," she said.

"I suppose so."

Then the phone rang. It was a peach-colored telephone, exactly matching the paint on the living-room walls. It cost more than a plain black phone, but Sue—Charley's wife—had liked it, so he didn't mind.

"Charley, this is Swede Swanson," said the voice on the phone.

"Hi, Swede." Charley settled his big frame in the easy chair. His voice was calm. "What's on your mind?"

"It's about the Chamber of Commerce lunch at the Hotel Pierce. You're on the Arrangements Committee, too, you know. Couple of the boys were suggesting chow mein and eggs foo yong. Whaddaya say?"

"Listen," said Charley, "if you fellows want that kind of food, why, some day let's all go across the bay to the City, to Chinatown, where they know

how to make it; where they make a business of it. But if we're eating at the Hotel Pierce, why, if you ask me, as far as I'm concerned, ham 'n' eggs are good enough for the C. of C. lunch. Okay?"

The other man laughed.

"That Charley . . . sometimes I think he's *too* American! Me, I *like* Chinese food!" They joked a bit more, then hung up.

It was a brightly furnished house, neat and cheerful, but it was haunted and there was an air of fear in it. Sue looked up from a calendar.

"It's the 10th," she said. "I forgot about that."

"Gee, so did I . . . well, it can't be helped. The bank, the post office, then the old man."

"Charley . . ." Sue came over to him, put her hands on his shoulders and looked up at him. "Do you think . . . when do you think . . . I mean . . . oh, Charley, will they ever let him out?"

He put his arms around her, very gently.

"No," he said. "They won't ever let him out. I've known that for a long time. Why should they? But what can I do?" his voice was low, pleading. "What else can I do?"

"I know," she said. "Of course you can't do anything else."

There was no need for her to voice the unspoken thought, *It's not the money I care about. It isn't the money.* He knew that. She knew he knew it. But, sooner or later, they would have to come to a point where they would have to ask, "But where is the money going to come from?" This is a question average Americans ask each day. And Charley Long was, in many ways, a typical, average American.

At the bank the teller asked, "How's your Dad these days, Charley?"

"Fine, Sam. Just fine."

"We miss the old gentleman. Remember me to him."

"Thanks, Sam. I'll sure do that."

All this as usual.

But at the post office, something unusual. Bob Felsko, at the money order window, saw him coming, withdrew, went into the postmaster's office. In about half a minute, Clarence McLeod, the postmaster.

"Oh, *hello,* Charley!" Too cheerful. "Oh, *say*! Can you come into my office for just a second." Too casual.

"Why, sure, Mac."

Take a seat. Cigarette? How's the family? Mmm-hmm. Oh. By the way. This just came in. Got to post it on the bulletin board. Orders. Post offices all over the country. English, you see, and, um, uh, and Chinese. Yeah. Take a look. What do you say, good translation?

Carefully, the postmaster look-

ed away. Charley read. Handed it back.

"Seems to be a correct translation, Mac."

"Does, hey. Hmm . . . That's fine . . ." Poor Mac. Not liking this at all.

"Well, Charley," — deep breath—"look, Charley. We've always been good friends. I know you're a loyal American. Bronze Star, Purple Heart. Naturally, you can't be happy about what's going on in China nowadays. Still, the law's the law. And this is the law"—he tapped the notice—"right here. It is illegal from now on to send any money to Red China: not cash, not checks, bank draft, money order, any negotiable instrument. It's illegal to send money anywhere else for transshipment to Red China. They take those U. S. dollars, Charley, and they buy munitions and machinery with them, and—"

"Let me set your mind at ease, Mac," Charley said. "The money orders I send to Hong Kong the 10th of each month are not for transshipment to Red China."

"Well, I didn't mean, exactly—"

"They are for my step-mother. Don't know if you were aware that my Dad remarried after he went back?"

"Why, no, Charley, I wasn't. That-a-fact?"

"Yes, he married again. Has two little girls, in fact. The immigration laws, you know, are still kind of stiff about Chinese coming into this country. And my Dad still has an interest in the business—it was partly his money, you know—"

"Now, Charley," McLeod got up; "you don't have to tell me all this. I'm not trying to pry into your personal affairs. It's just that, well, not as a Federal official, but as your friend—and not knowing, exactly—well, I figured you should be told. You never know, I mean."

"That's okay, Mac. It was thoughtful of you, anyway."

They stood at the door.

"Well, give the old gentleman my regards, Charley, when you write. And, look, about this immigration business, if you think it might help, well, I and Congressman Coons are pretty close, you know. I could speak to him—?"

"Not just yet, Mac. But thanks. Maybe someday soon."

Then it was back to the supermarket and hard at work until closing time. Joking with the customers, putting groceries in bags and the bags in cartons, taking money, making change, laughing, joking, listening to other people's troubles. It was a big, bright, modern, up-to-date market, but it, too, was haunted.

But he got through the day, and through supper, and when the children were settled—the

younger one in bed, the final story told, the final drink of water given; the older one flat on his stomach watching the Western film—he and his wife went into their room and locked the door.

He took a sum of money—not the comparatively small sum gone via international money order to the step-mother in Hong Kong — but a much larger amount; and together they divided it in two packages and wrapped it in red paper.

"Ceremony," Sue said. "Even ransom has to be paid ceremoniously. Every gift in pairs, because that's the custom. I thought they were getting rid of all the old customs and ceremonies in China now."

"It's not because of them. It's because of the old man."

"A lot of consideration he deserves," Sue said, bitterly. "He was your father's friend."

Charley was silent.

"Why did your father go back? If he felt he wanted to die among his own people, he could have stayed in Hong Kong. He didn't have to cross the border. Besides, with a new wife and two children, he was a long way from dying. He should have avoided the risk for their sake."

"He wanted to pray at his father's grave," Charley explained, patiently. He had been through all this before, but he felt he owed it to his wife to bear with her. After all, in a way, it was her money, too—her's and the children's—that they were wrapping up now, that they would never see again. "At first the *Ba-Lu,* the Communists, were nice as pie. Oh, sure, Mr. Long Yü-chuan, you want a visa to visit your ancestral village? Why, of course. Then, when he's walked into their parlor—"

"I know. I'm sorry. I know. We have to do it."

Then he told her about the notice at the post office. She looked at him. She put her hand to her head, but she didn't say anything.

"If I send off the money," he said, "I'm a traitor to my own country. If I don't, they torture my father to death. First they used the excuse of unpaid taxes. Then it was special levies. Then, suddenly, he was a criminal—my old father, who was so softhearted he used to use a special cage to trap the mice and then release them again: he's a criminal—and there are heavy fines. Then it was simply a demand. Pay. Or else. Pay. And pay. Who knows if he's even still alive?"

"Oh, no," Sue said.

"Anyone could use his seal. Maybe I won't send the money. Sometime I'll have to stop. After all, those men are my enemies, the enemies of my country."

The bell rang.

It was a teen-age boy. His face brightened when he saw Charley.

"I guess this *is* for you," he said, handing Charley a letter. "See, our name is Long, too. We live on Porter *Place,* and the letter was addressed Porter *Street*; well, there isn't any such street, but there's a Porter Avenue. It just says, 'Mr. Long,' but I guess it must be for you. Maçao, that's a Portuguese colony in China, my atlas says."

Charley thanked him, offered a tip, was politely refused. He knew no one in Maçao. Sitting in the easy chair while young Jimmy Long watched the cattle rustlers bite the dust, he opened the letter.

The letter did not have the usual vermilion seal his father had had specially cut and was so proud of; nor had the letter been written by a professional scribe. It was in his father's own unskilled hand. He was always ashamed of it. Charley could hear the old man's voice—"Although I came of scholarly stock, I was obliged to work like a coolie at an age when you, my son, were learning the Four Books and the skilled use of the writing brush. So it is that I can scarcely form even the Thousand Characters, and write as a child, as a poorly educated child."

But Charley had never seen anything of his father's writing so poorly written as this. The signs were very rough. It must have been done in haste, he thought—then he winced, thinking, *Maybe it was done in pain! Perhaps his hand faltered because he was faint with hunger . . . perhaps he held his fingers so that they should not touch the paper and leave traces of blood there* . . . He saw the straggling columns of ideographic characters through a mist of tears.

"Hey!" Jimmy was at his elbow. "A letter from Granpop?"

"Yes."

"Yay! Is he coming home soon? What's he say, Daddy?"

"I haven't read it yet."

"Oh. Say, Daddy . . ."

"Yes?"

"Listen, there's a good TV program on tomorrow at eleven. Could I stay home and watch it?"

Charley took his son and held him between his knees. "No, you go to Sunday school, same as always." Jimmy capitulated with a cheerful grin. "Son . . . I want to ask you . . . did anyone . . . does anyone . . . at school, or when you're playing with the kids . . . anyone ever push you around?"

Jimmy's forehead creased in thought, cleared. Another grin.

"Well, just that one time."

"What one time? You never told me. What did you do?"

"Ah," the boy wiggled, embarrassed. "Some kid was giving me a bad time. So I hit him. Real hard. Then he let me alone."

"I see."

"It don't pay to fool around

with those kind of characters," he informed his father. Then he wriggled away, eel-like, and began pasting things in his scrapbook. Sometimes it appears that young boys have no bones, other times they appear to be all bones.

Charley read through the letter, read through it again, folded it.

In his room he said to his wife, "Unwrap the money."

"What?" She looked up.

"Unwrap the money. There's a letter from my father."

Her face, for a moment, was radiant.

"They let him go?" Then she saw this was not what he had to say.

"He said not to pay any more. He said we'd need the money for ourselves and the children and for the second wife and her children. He said that after what he's been through he has no desire to live."

Sue, weeping, asked, "But how did they let him write that?"

"They didn't. It must have been smuggled out."

She took his hand. "What do you think?" she asked.

"I think he must be dead by now. I hope he is dead by now." There were no tears in his eyes as he said it.

In order to go from Piercetown to the City across the bay, you can cross by bridge at one point, or by ferry at another point. If the route chosen is by land the whole way, then the road passes through a small city where there is a very old Chinese settlement. Most of its former residents have become Americanized enough not to want to live in the old houses any more, and have moved to the suburbs. Some of the buildings are boarded up, some are given over to lodging-houses for transient workers or cheap restaurants or are used for storehouses. In one building, still kept in repair, lived a Mr. Wong Lun, upstairs, over a shop now operated by employees. He had sons, but they preferred to live elsewhere. Mr. Wong Lun greeted Charley Long with old-fashioned ceremony. The nature of their business was not, of course, mentioned at first. They drank tea, they nibbled on this sweet and that.

"A certain person," Charley said, at last, "appears now and then in an automobile near my house. He drives around it, but says nothing. This frightens my foolish wife."

No word was said, or needed to be said, that the appearance of the stranger was the prearranged signal for Charley to start wrapping money.

The old man sipped tea.

"This person is not large, and has a mole over one eye. I have had a curiosity to speak with him," Charley said.

The old man nodded.

"Many strangers," he said, "can be contacted at a certain address in the City across the water." Slowly he opened a telephone directory and allowed the fingernail of his index finger to rest beside one line for a moment. Then he closed the book.

"You are a filial son," he said, "and you have been filial even to me, who does not deserve it. My own sons are not so—they speak roughly—they demand money, they speak only of money to me. In America, they say, fathers must maintain their sons. I cannot bear it when my sons come to me and I have no money for them. I am a weak and fearful man. I would rather die than lose face by having my sons shout at me. If I have no money to give them . . . At first, I thought I was helping your father by acting as go-between. Now I know the truth, but I cannot stop. Forgive me."

"Do not speak of it, Old Master."

"And not only for my sons . . . I must have money for my funerary expenses. My sons do not care if I wander through the Spirit World naked and penniless. They are not like you. You will see that your honored father has a proper funeral, that spirit money and spirit clothes are burned for him, and food offered for his soul." He sighed.

"I will do this for you, Old Master." Charley spoke earnestly. "I will see that both my honored father and the honored father of your sons will have a funeral you may both be proud of."

The old man looked up. "You are a good son, and a better friend to me than I deserve," he said. "But what if you cannot obtain his body?" There was no longer any pretense between them.

"You know our custom in such cases, Old Master. I shall hold a proxy funeral. Another body will be obtained, and both souls will gain the merit of the funeral services."

Wong Lun nodded, slowly. His waxen old face was grave.

"Your plan is good," he said. "But to obtain another Chinese body in America is not easy. It is unlike China, where the children of dead paupers are glad to consent to such an arrangement."

He looked at him questioningly.

"It occurs to me, Old Master," said Charley Long, gently, "that I might hear of a man, newly dead, whose sons are not filial, and who might agree to save themselves the expenses of a proper funeral. Perhaps I might hear of such a man's death soon, for I fear my honored father has already died and even now waits, hungry and restless and unavenged, in the Spirit World."

Their eyes met and they looked at one another for a long mo-

ment. At last Wong Lun spoke.

"It is well," he said. "Your words are wise. A man without filial sons is as one already dead. I am old. When the blossoms have fallen from the tree, why should one pluck the empty bough?"

Charley Long's head sunk down on his chest.

"In the middle drawer of that cabinet," Wong Lun said, "is a certain medicine, wrapped in white silk . . . You are very kind. So. I fear it is rather dry. May I trouble you to pour me a cup of this very poor tea? Thank you." He drank his cup, then, with an effort, arose.

"Will you join me, son of my old friend, to worship Great Buddha? Let us," he said, as he leaned on the younger man and crossed the room, "make our *kao-tao* together to him. I have often thought," he observed, as they lit the curly sticks of incense and sank to their knees, "that only here do I find peace."

The golden image gazed down at them, blandly and benignly.

The old man whispered the litany. Three times he repeated it. Then he was silent.

It was some weeks later that Swanson said to Charley Long—this was at the Rotary lunch—"Say, did you know this Chinese fellow they fished out of the Bay?"

"There you go again," Charley said. "He's a Chinese, so I got to know him. Naturally I know all the Chinese in the State. Just like you know all the Swedes."

"Well, I guess it *is* pretty silly of me," Swanson admitted. "But I thought you might've read it in the papers Tuesday."

"On Tuesday," Charley said, "I was across the bay in the City attending a memorial service for my father and one of his old friends who died recently."

Swanson was embarrassed.

"Oh, that's right," he said. "Sorry . . . I was real sad when I heard he passed away, Charley. A fine gentleman."

"Thank you. But what about this guy they fished out of the bay?"

"Oh, nothing much." Swanson reached for a piece of celery. "Little guy, with a mole over one eye. Paper said he must've fallen on the pier, hit his head, and just tumbled in and drowned."

"Oh, how terrible," Charley observed. He speared a radish.

"What about this State Convention next month? You going?" he asked. Calmly, he chewed the radish. His teeth were large and white and even.

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